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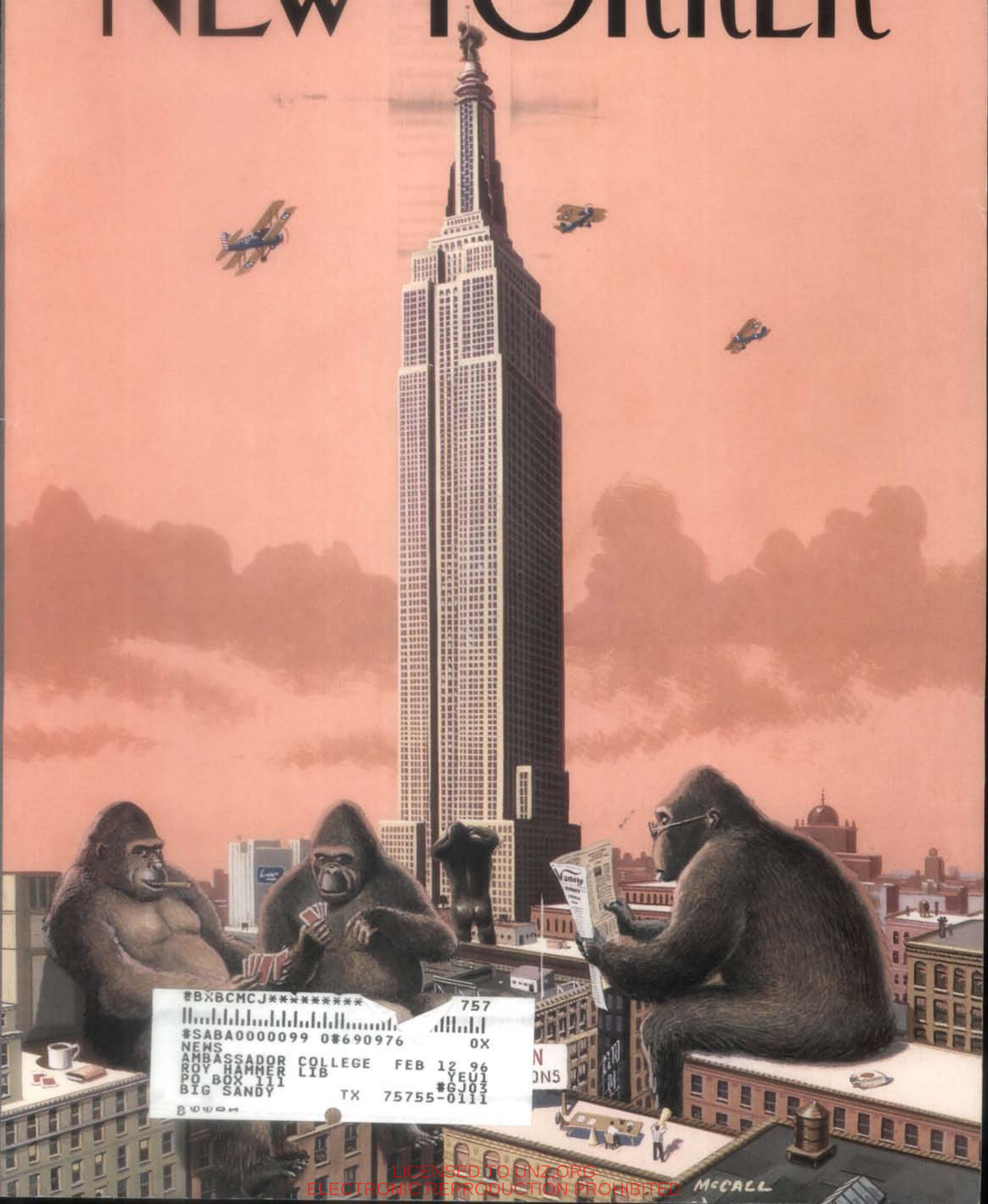

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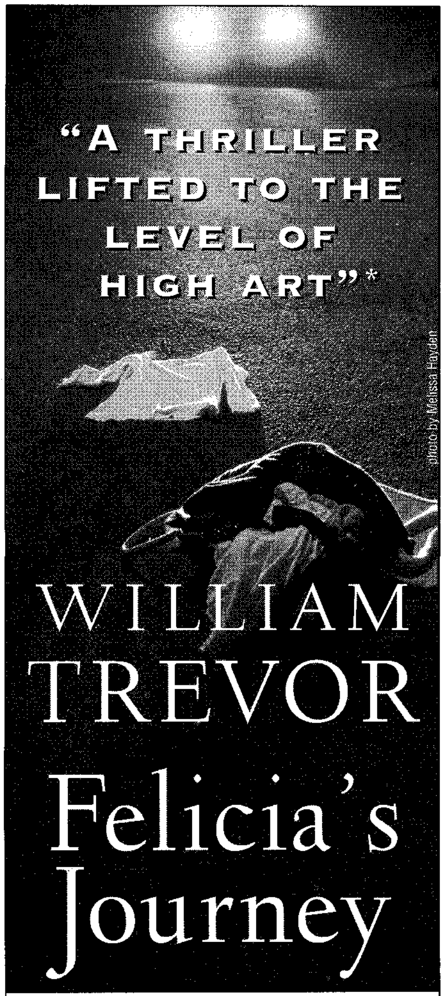

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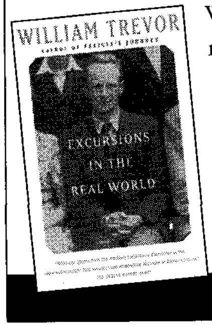
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JANUARY 23, 1995

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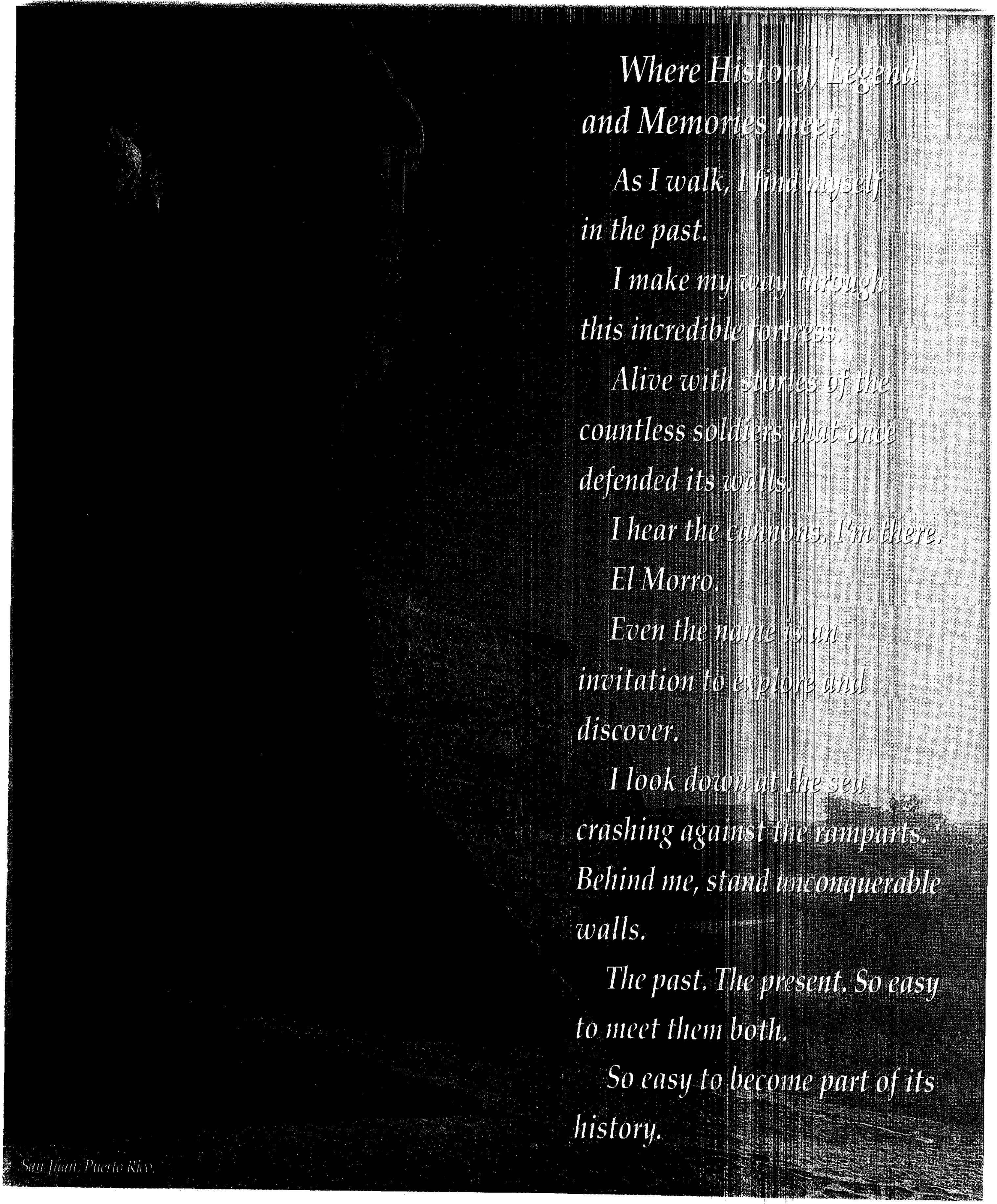

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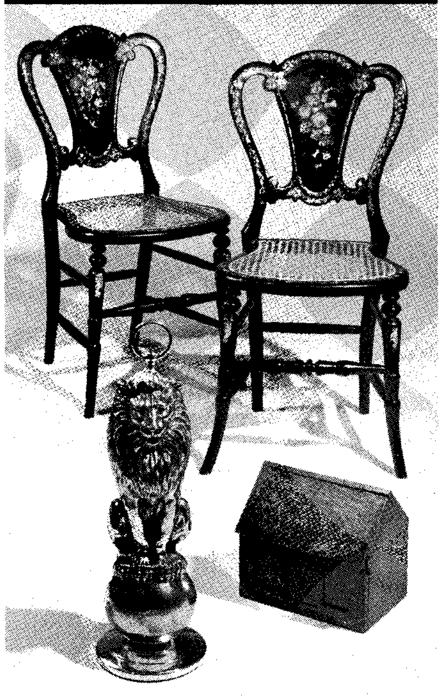

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COMMENT

LET THEM EAT LAPTOPS

The poor will get no shoes, but they can boot up.

ON January 5th, testifying before the House Ways and Means Committee, Speaker Newt Gingrich proposed the creation of a new means-tested welfare benefit: laptop computers.

"Maybe we need a tax credit," he said, "for the poorest Americans to buy a laptop. Now, maybe that's wrong, maybe it's expensive, maybe we can't do it. But I'll tell you, any signal we can send to the poorest Americans that says, 'We're going into a twenty-first-century, third-wave information age, and so are you, and we want to carry you with us,' begins to change the game."

Gingrich himself labelled the laptop tax credit "a nutty idea," but he was using the word "nutty" in its modern, self-congratulatory sense, in which insanity is linked with creativity and freedom from convention. The Speaker was projecting his preferred image of himself as pixie-like and imaginative (as opposed to his critics' preferred image of him as nasty and calculating). Also high-tech and future-oriented (as opposed to old-fashioned and backward-looking). Also, of course, full of generous feelings toward the poor (as opposed to Ebenezer Scrooge-like).

On January 10th, addressing the Progress and Freedom Foundation (one of his front groups), Gingrich conceded that the laptop tax-credit idea was not merely "nutty" but "dumb," and added, "I shouldn't have said it." He even revealed that he had called up George Will to apologize—apparently what one does in such circumstances—though he did not reveal whether Will had given him absolution. Still, it's worth considering the idea, because what's wrong with it illuminates what's wrong with a lot of what comes out of the Speaker's mouth.

As a Republican, Gingrich naturally did not propose that the government should give away or subsidize laptops directly (let alone manufacture them). Instead, he proposed a "tax credit." Now, a tax credit increases the deficit exactly as much as an equivalent direct-spending program. It commandeers and directs private funds by government fiat, in the service of some purported social goal, just as direct government spending does. But in the prevailing Republican theology a tax credit is different, because it is "allowing people to keep more of their own money." By this reckoning, tax credits

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make the government smaller, while direct spending makes it bigger. So a laptop tax credit would bring poor folks into the computer age without enlarging the government—something that would, of course, be anathema.

One problem, though. The poor have no use for a tax credit, because the poor pay no taxes (or no income taxes, anyway). Thanks to Bill Clinton's 1993 budget deal, which cut taxes for millions of the working poor—and which Gingrich, along with every other Republican in Congress, ardently opposed—a typical family is free of the income tax until its annual income reaches around twenty-five thousand dollars. That is well above the poverty line.

Gingrich would have two options here. He could raise taxes on the poor (which in the case of income-tax rates would require a three-fifths vote in the House, under rules passed last week), in order to make the tax credit useful. Or he could make the credit "refundable," meaning that if the credit is higher than your tax bill the government sends you a check for the difference. In this case, since the tax bill of virtually all poor people is zero, they would be entitled to a government check for the full amount of the credit.

And "entitled" is the word. The Republicans' welfare-reform proposal would end "entitlement" status for major welfare programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The government would allot a certain amount of money each year, and if it ran out—say, because of a recession—the poor would just have to do without. Various categories of welfare mothers, such as unmarried women under the age of eighteen, would be made ineligible for A.F.D.C. from the beginning. But no welfare mother would have to do without her laptop, because tax credits are not budgeted like normal spending programs, owing to the cherished fiction that they're different. There is even talk of ending the entitlement status of food stamps. Under compassionate Speaker Gingrich, though, "computer stamps," at least, would be safe. Let them eat laptops.

Then there's the cost. There are about forty million Americans living below the official poverty line. At, say, a thousand dollars each for a modest laptop computer—no color screens; we don't want to spoil these people—we're talking about a potential bill of forty billion dollars, if every poor person took up Newt's invitation to join him on the information highway.

Imagine if Bill Clinton or Hillary Clinton or Ira Magaziner had proposed such a thing, even speculatively: a forty-billion-dollar welfare program to buy poor people laptop computers. Rush Limbaugh would pop his buttons. The Heritage Foundation would flood the mails with cost estimates and warnings about how computers can be misused for criminal purposes. Republican Newtoids in Congress would be lining up on C-SPAN to offer mocking sound bites about foolish liberalism.

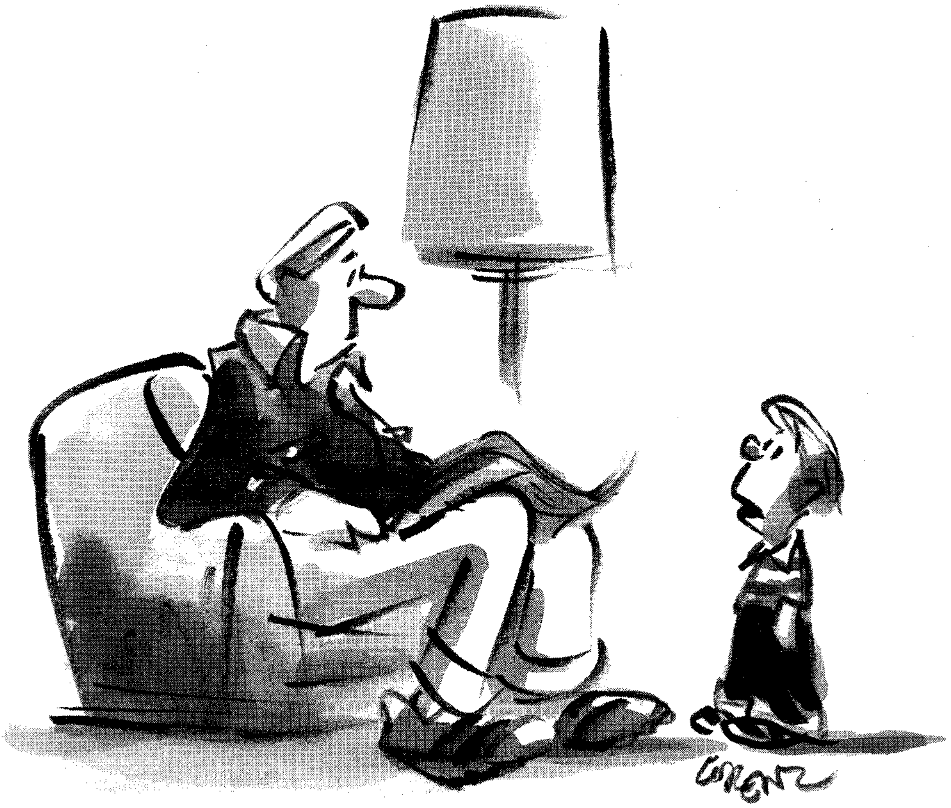
Perhaps this is making too much of a throwaway comment. But the triumphant Republicans, having won what they claim (with some justification) was a historic referendum on "government," owe us seriousness on the question of government's proper role. Do they seriously wish to defend a vision of America where all citizens are guaranteed laptop computers but not health care?

Newt Gingrich came to his current position of power through the relentless denigration of government as an institution that can do nothing right, wastes most of the resources allocated to it, and corrupts the very beneficiaries of its misguided largesse. That he could off-handedly urge the government to start giving away laptop computers suggests that he either doesn't believe or doesn't understand his own propaganda.

Even as he retracted his endorsement of a laptop tax credit, Gingrich repeated his "passionate" commitment to seeing poor people plugged into the Internet. This is a fine sentiment. But passion is no substitute for money. Either society owes everyone a computer or it does not. Principled conservatives have the courage to say it does not. Unprincipled conservatives want moral credit for wishing everyone had a computer while sneering at any conceivable method for making that wish come true.

Gingrich seems to think he can turn various personalities on and off like a light bulb. One day he is Newt the Destroyer, out to bring down the government; the next day he is Kindly Uncle Newt, handing out government-financed computers. After sixteen years as the fiercest partisan in Washington, he declares that he wishes to put aside partisanship, and then explodes in self-righteous anger when reporters express skepticism. You could say this makes the new House Speaker complex and interesting. Or you could say it makes him a phony.

—MICHAEL KINSLEY



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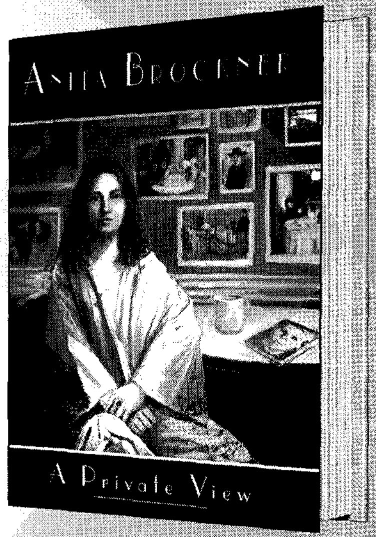

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RANDOM HOUSE

IN THE MAIL

ALL THAT JAZZ

Jervis Anderson, in his comments on my debate with Wynton Marsalis (Onward and Upward with the Arts, December 12th), cites figures provided by Mr. Marsalis showing that roughly half of the musicians employed by the program were black. This figure is accurate only if you count each musician once regardless of how many times he or she appeared. If Mr. Marsalis provided figures based on numbers of appearances by black and white musicians, they would show that whites are a small minority.

Mr. Anderson's article omitted another complaint that many people have had against the Lincoln Center jazz program: Mr. Marsalis has given a disproportionate number of commissions to himself and his associates, most of them black. Further, Mr. Marsalis has said that the choice of programs would be governed by his "taste," which so far has not included any of the major white figures in jazz history, among them such seminal musicians as Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Bill Evans, and Gil Evans. It seems to me that all of this, taken together, is prima facie evidence of racial bias in the Lincoln Center jazz program. Federal grants are not generally given to racially biased institutions. Lincoln Center would be well advised to review its jazz programs in this light. As Mr. Anderson himself wrote, Mr. Marsalis "didn't answer all of Collier's points." He still hasn't.

JAMES LINCOLN COLLIER
New York City

Wynton Marsalis's Jazz at Lincoln Center program would not get "the critics so riled" if there were more presentations. He would then need a greater variety of jazz and personnel. For Mr. Marsalis and his associates to become "a full constituent of the arts at Lincoln Center," his offerings should occur there as often as those of the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera.

HOWARD LAWRENCE
Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.

The most unsettling thing about Wynton Marsalis is not that he favors black musicians over white musicians, or that he can have a sharp tongue. The problem is that Mr. Marsalis thinks that the history of jazz ended around 1965, so he tends to discredit the considerable achievements of all those musicians who have strived to develop the form since then, invigorating jazz with electric instruments, multicultural rhythms, freer forms of improvisation. It is this openness to experimentation that has allowed jazz to evolve. Not all the experiments have been successful, but at least they have been welcome. By turning jazz into a repertory music, Mr. Marsalis risks turning it into a historical genre, like ragtime or twelve-tone music, which will certainly limit its greatness and its influence. It's a shame that jazz is guided by a man of such provincial taste. Mr. Marsalis's narrowness is more contrary to the tradition than anything else about him.

DAVID ROTHENBERG
Brooklyn Heights, N.Y.

BOSNIAN OFFENSIVE

Michael Kelly's Letter from Washington ("Surrender and Blame," December 19th) exposes the many parties complicitous in the tragedy of Bosnia and the return of genocide to Europe. Mr. Kelly writes that "Eagleburger and Scowcroft both believe that a tough-minded initiative, led by the United States and centering on NATO, might have averted what Eagleburger now sees as an unfixable tragedy." But how was NATO to go on the offensive when it had been expressly established as a defensive organization and had played that role successfully for forty-odd years? Even now, three years and countless moral outrages later, NATO remains unable to mount the kind of response to international crises that Eagleburger and Scowcroft see fit to prescribe in retrospect. The problem began when the Bush Administration neglected to fill a vacuum left by a strategic deficit, thereby raising the potential for violence throughout Europe. By not realizing that the collapse of the Warsaw Pact signalled an immediate need to transform NATO into a post-Cold War institution—one that could have brought the Russians onboard when it was still possible to do so—they failed to create a bulwark against the rising tide of nationalism in the periphery of the former Soviet empire. The New World Order was left to run itself without any New World institutions. No means of action have yet been established, and NATO's transformation is more unlikely than ever. I applaud Mr. Kelly for having reminded us what the absence of American leadership on the world historical stage really means, and costs.

MYRON L. BRICK
Joliet, Ill.

Mr. Kelly's article appears to miss the point that neither the Bush nor the Clinton Administration has thought it advisable to intervene with ground troops in the conflict in Bosnia. The reasons are mostly military. Mr. Kelly makes one passing reference to a "dovish" Pentagon. Many Pentagon officials have stated that the use of air strikes in preventing the Serb onslaught would be ineffective. The alternative, sending in two hundred thousand infantry, sends a tremor down the spine, in light of the memory of Vietnam. Therefore, what Mr. Kelly depicts as weak foreign-policy resolve may in fact be judicious, even in the face of the tragedy of the war. The Balkans are an epicenter for conflagration; the First World War began in Sarajevo. It would be better if the Third World War did not.

WILLIAM KARELIS
Boulder, Colo.

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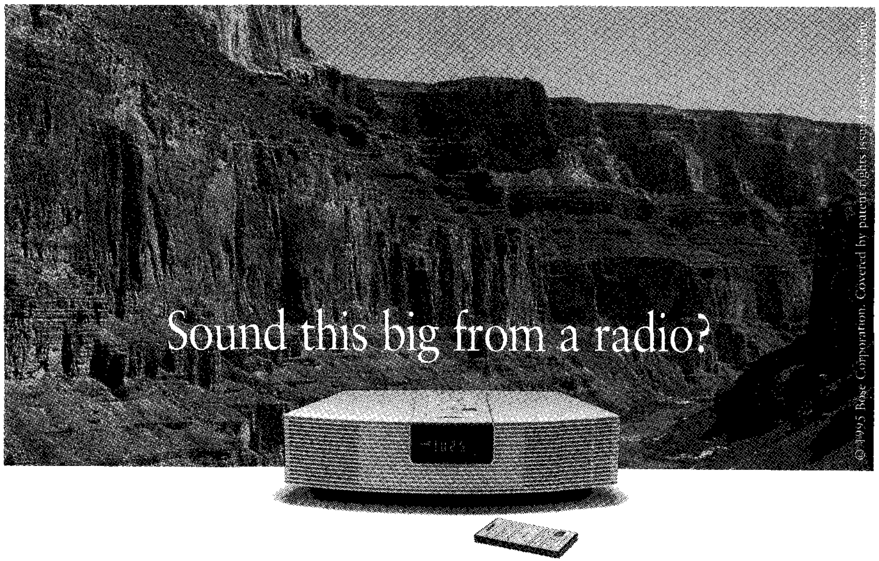
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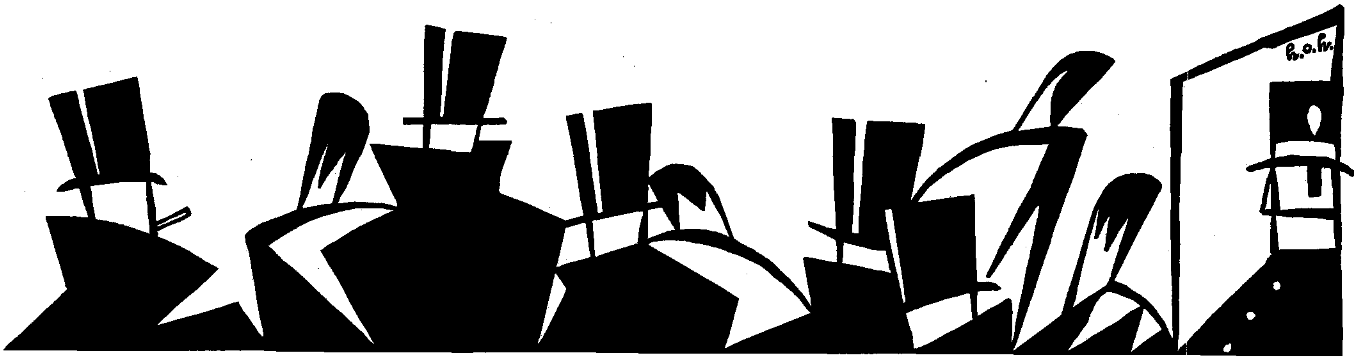

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE THEATRE

Small Scale, Big Time

"PEOPLE think I've done much more theatre than I have," Melissa Manchester said the other day, in a conversation about "I Sent a Letter to My Love," the new musical that she has co-written. "It's because I'm such a showoff." Since she made her name in the seventies with power ballads like "Don't Cry Out Loud" (and her new album, "If My Heart Had Wings," doesn't want for showstoppers), it comes as a surprise that "I Sent a Letter," which begins previews this week at Primary Stages, has only five characters and a minimum of razzle-dazzle. "No demented townfolk show up to high-kick in the middle of songs," she says firmly.

It's not that Manchester has no feel for lavish productions; her father was a bassoonist in the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, and she grew up watching "Aida" and "Madama Butterfly" from the wings. But the new show, based on Bernice Rubens' novel of the same name, has a small-scale premise: a brother and sister try to break the monotony of their small-town lives by placing a personals ad in the local newspaper. Manchester and her co-writer, Jeffrey Sweet, have moved the setting from the seventies back to the fifties, but don't expect rock and roll. Instead there will be simple ballads sung by such seasoned actors as Lynne Wintersteller and Robert Westenberg, and, according to Manchester, "some quite mad musical moments. That's what's appropriate for people who've done nothing with their lives. They go nuts."

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(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

AFTER-PLAY—A comedy by Anne Meara, in which four old chums get together and spill some secrets. With Barbara Barrie and Rue McClanahan, among others. The director is David Saint. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

CASCANDO and **EH JOE**—Two one-acts from the sixties by Samuel Beckett, with John Giorno in the latter. The double bill opens Jan. 19 at 7:30 and runs through Jan. 29. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

HAVE YOU SPOKEN TO ANY JEWS LATELY?—A comedy by Bruce Jay Friedman. Previews through Jan. 22. Opens Jan. 23 at 8. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE—A musical by Melissa Manchester and Jeffrey Sweet. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE—Ron Leibman is Shylock, in a production of Shakespeare's comedy directed by Barry Edelstein. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

THE MOLIÈRE COMEDIES—Brian Bedford stars in a double bill of works by the seventeenth-century French dramatist: "The Imaginary Cuckold" and "The School for Husbands." In previews. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

ONE WOMAN SHOE—In this new collaboration by the brother-sister team of David and Amy Sedaris, social-services applicants can't receive benefits until they put on a one-person show. Ms. Sedaris appears in the cast, too. Opens Jan. 19 at 10. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

THE SUGAR BEAN SISTERS—A play set in the Florida swamplands, by Nathan Sanders. Preview on Jan. 18. Opens Jan. 19 at 8. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST—Disney's Broadway money-spinner, adapted from the animated-film version, has a few moments of solid-gold theatrical amazement: the showstopping "Be Our Guest" production number and the Beast's transformation into the Prince. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/2/94.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100.)

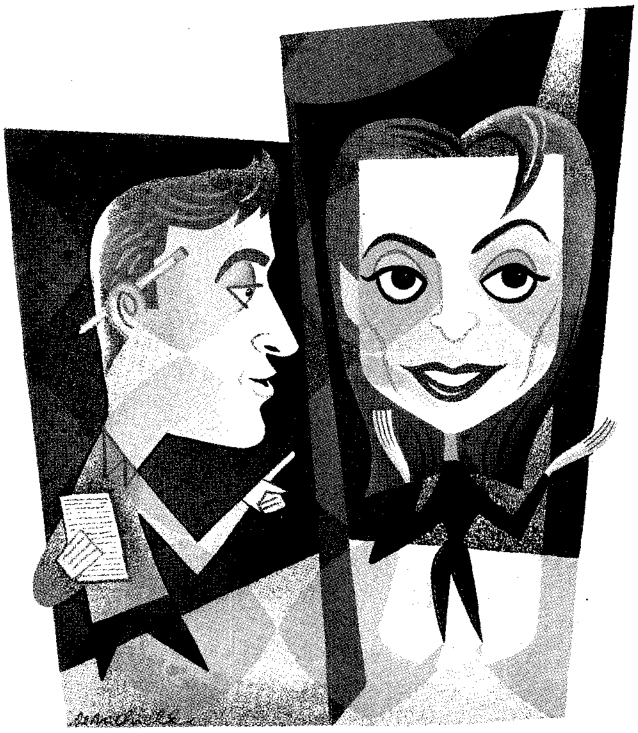
BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE—A 1976 play by Dennis Potter. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. Closes Feb. 12. For reservations, call 330-9327.)

CARMEN—The Ridiculous Theatrical Company's version of the opera, with Everett Quinton in the title role. (Charles Ludlam Theatre, 1 Sheridan Sq. 691-2271.)

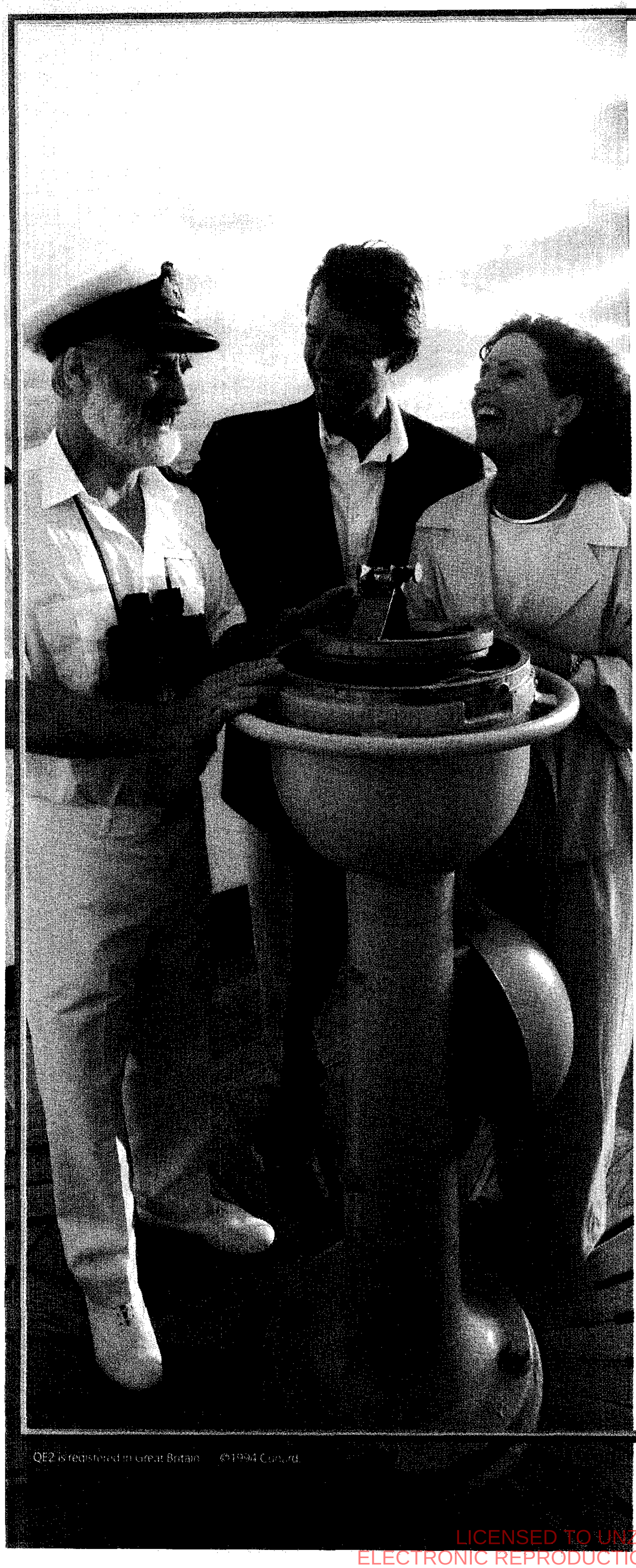
A DOLL'S LIFE—A musical that starts where "A Doll's House" ends: with Nora slamming the door on her husband. The book and lyrics, by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, explore the ambiguities of female selfhood and independence with intelligence and wit, but Larry Grossman's music—here performed in a two-piano arrangement—isn't quite the stuff that memories are made of. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Jan. 22.)

DYLAN THOMAS: RETURN JOURNEY and **THE TRUMAN CAPOTE TALK SHOW**—Two one-man shows written by, and starring, the Welsh actor Bob Kingdom, and directed by Anthony Hopkins and Kevin Knight, respectively. The pieces are performed in repertory, and they're both laced with alcohol-enhanced humor. "Dylan Thomas" has the poetry, but "Truman Capote" is the chattier, more enjoyable affair. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 307-4100.)

THE EMPEROR OF THE MOON—Aphra Behn's 1687 farce, about a learned man who is tricked into letting his daughter marry her lover, is in many ways typical of its era, but it has a harder (and surprisingly feminist) edge. Arden Party's production, directed by Karin Coonrod, is filled with annoying stylistic tics, but the cast is terrific. (Ohio Theatre, 66


David and Amy Sedaris's "One Woman Shoe," at La Mama.

ROBERT DEMICHIELI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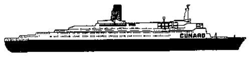

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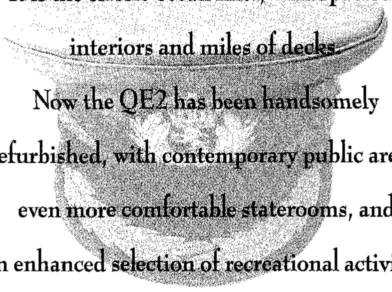

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CUNARD

76 L

Queen Elizabeth 2

Wooster St. Closes Jan. 29. For reservations, call 969-0551.)

Grandma Sylvia's Funeral—The audience is part of the group of mourners in this comedy by Glenn Wein and Amy Lord Blumsack, which is set in a Jewish mortuary. (Playhouse on Vandam, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555.)

Grease!—The talented cast and the inventive production team show off the gleeful phonyness of Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey's musical with unembarrassed affection, and the result is a fun fake that's not trying to pass as the real thing. With Brooke Shields as Rizzo. (5/30/94) (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Hapgood—Tom Stoppard's 1988 play, which looks at the world of espionage through the lens of particle physics (or is it the other way around?), is a kind of dramatization of Heisenbergian uncertainty. The production is as mesmerizing as the play is bewildering; Stockard Channing, Josef Sommer, and David Strathairn, under the direction of Jack O'Brien, give confident, watchable performances that nevertheless don't bring you closer to the heart of the matter. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The House of Yes—SoHo Rep continues its "strong language, sexual situations, some violence" season with a play by Wendy MacLeod that deals with guns, twins, and incest. (46 Walker St. 334-0962.)

An Inspector Calls—J. B. Priestley's 1945 mystery is not really a play—it's a speech, about every man's link to every other man. The cast has ideas, not actions, to play. Directed by Stephen Daldry. (5/16/94) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

I've Got the Shakes—A new play written and directed by Richard Foreman and performed by his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

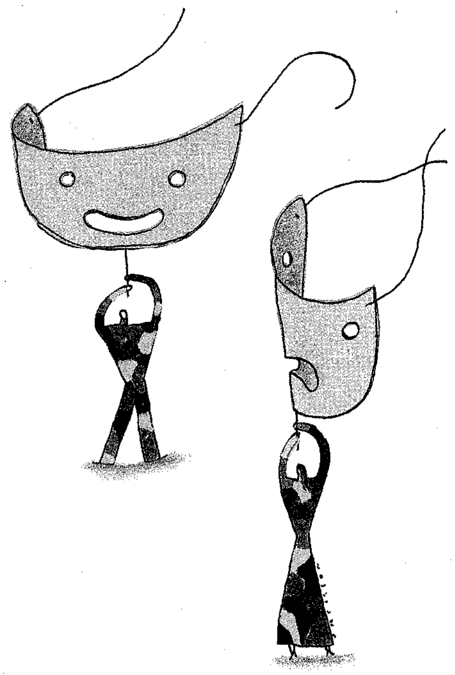
Jackie Mason: Politically Incorrect—A former rabbi from a family of rabbis, Mason uses the stage as his bully pulpit. Behind his shtick, which is sometimes vulgar but always funny, is a fundamentalist disgust at the world's fraud, wickedness, hypocrisy, and inhumanity. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Jean Cocteau Repertory—The company's unnuanced production of Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard" runs in repertory with the American première of Italian playwright Eduardo De Filippo's "Napoli Milionaria" (1945), in a translation by Tori Haring-Smith. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

Jelly Roll!—The snakily elegant Vernel Bagneris plays Jelly Roll Morton, in a wonderful show that traces the musician's transformation from New Orleans dandy into jazz legend. Morten Gunnar Larsen provides the thrilling piano accompaniment. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 265-1086.)

Jesus Christ Superstar—A brief engagement. (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Closes Jan. 29.)

Lesbian Bathhouse—A romantic comedy written and directed by Helen Eisenbach. With Sally Sockwell. (WOW Café, 59 E. 4th St. 460-8067. Closes Feb. 4.)



J. JACKSON

The Little Book of Professor Engima—A dark comedy by the late Harry Kondoleon. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes Jan. 22.)

Living Proof—A comedy written by Gordon Rayfield and presented by the Jewish Repertory Theatre. (Playhouse 91, 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000. Closes Jan. 29.)

Love! Valour! Compassion!—Terrence McNally's beautifully written new drama is moving from Manhattan Theatre Club to Broadway; performances begin at the Walter Kerr on Jan. 20. Anthony Heald replaces Stephen Spinella, but the rest of the cast, including the wonderful Nathan Lane, moves with the show. (11/14/94) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players—Presenting "Princess Ida," which plays Jan. 19-22. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.)

Nunsense 2: The Sequel—In the second coming of writer-director Dan Goggin's hit, five talented actresses take the veil and perform a revue to raise money for their convent. There's dancing, singing, boozing, and bingo, but none of it saves the show from the clutches of cliché. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.)

Old Times—The Independent Theatre Company's production of Harold Pinter's 1971 drama, about the sexually obsessed members of a triangle, has distracting sound effects and some uneven pacing under the direction of Dan Tedlie, but the capable actors—Michelle Gigante, Paul Todaro, and Julia Langham—manage to make the evening intense and wrenching. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088. Closes Jan. 28.)

Public Enemy—Kenneth Branagh's play is not much more than a moody knockabout, but it does offer an enticing conceit: a Belfast boy (Paul Ronan) works the nightclub circuit as a Jimmy Cagney impersonator until the Troubles turn his gangster fantasies into real-life drama. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318.)

Show Boat—Harold Prince's bighearted production of the 1927 Jerome Kern–Oscar Hammerstein II musical is epic-size, full of life and full of vision. With John McMartin and Elaine Stritch as the patriarch and the matriarch of the floating theatre, and Lonette McKee, whose moving rendition of "Bill" is the show's most intimate moment. (10/17/94) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Slavs!—American playwrights are rarely as articulate as Tony Kushner is in this short play—part meditation, part intellectual vaudeville—about the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the apparent collapse of socialism. Lisa Peterson directed the lively production. (1/16/94) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 302-6989. Closes Jan. 29.)

Sunset Boulevard—Glenn Close takes the monumental role of Norma Desmond and makes it something all her own, in Andrew Lloyd Webber's homage to Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's 1950 fable of Hollywood corruption and dementia. Also with George Hearn, Alan Campbell, and Alice Ripley; directed by Trevor Nunn. (12/5/94) (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007.)

That's Life!—A seriocomic revue about the variety of Jewish life in America. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.)

Three Tall Women—A moving, poetic play by Edward Albee, which is dominated by the huge, heroic performance of Myra Carter. Jordan Baker and the droll and delightful Marian Seldes are also in the cast. (5/16/94) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Tin Rep—The company presents "Winter Shorts," a program of scenes and one-acts. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. Closes Jan. 21. For reservations, call 505-6297.)

Two Johns Kissin Leslie—A new show in a new home, by the improv troupe Chicago City Limits. (Chicago City Limits Theatre, First Ave. at 61st St. 888-5233.)

The Venetian Twins—An eighteenth-century Italian comedy by Carlo Goldoni, in an enjoyable jokey translation by Michael Feingold. The cast, headed by Arnie Burton and Clement Fowler, exploits a mishmash of comic techniques, including masks, slapstick, and audience participation. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Jan. 28.)

Vita & Virginia—Eileen Atkins' Virginia Woolf shares the stage with Vanessa Redgrave's Vita Sackville-West in a play that Atkins put together from the letters that the women exchanged during their eighteen-year friendship. Redgrave is imposing and glamorous, but the brilliance of Woolf's writing stacks the theatrical deck in Atkins' favor, and she gives a quietly sensational, riveting performance. Zoe Caldwell directed. (12/12/94) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

You Should Be So Lucky—A long and largely unrewarding comedy in which Charles Busch appears, out of drag, as a shrinking-violet electrologist who comes into his own via an unlikely benefactor (Stephen Pearlman). Nell Campbell plays his sister, and Julie Halston is a veritable force of nature as a Scarsdale matron. (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

LONG RUNS

ALL IN THE TIMING: John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **BLOOD BROTHERS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **THE WHO'S TOMMY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY—PERFORMANCE ART, ETC.

The Players Club—The comedy duo known as Premium Bob in a new show. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Fridays at 8.)

NO(THING SO POWERFUL AS) TRUTH—A performance piece by Dan Hurlin, based on the life of William Loeb, the conservative publisher of the Manchester (New Hampshire) *Union Leader*. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Jan. 18-21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 3. Through Jan. 29.)

She's Just Away—Performance artist Rae C. Wright's work about love and death. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Jan. 19-22 at 7:30. Through Feb. 5.)

Dixon Place—Jan. 20 at 8: Thom Fogarty and Deb Margolin share a bill of performance art. . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: Dominique Dibbell presents an excerpt from her new piece, "Buried," and Amanda Vogel offers "I Am My Own Cheap Thrill." (258 Bowery, near Houston St. 219-3088.)

DANCE

Prêt-à-Danser

EDWARD VILLELLA, who enjoyed a long run as the New York City Ballet's homegrown exemplar of virtuosity and virility, was asked several years after he retired from the company to describe the difference between dancing for George Balanchine and dancing for Jerome Robbins. He answered in the language of fashion. Balanchine, he said, was like a great couturier: you would go into the studio, and the choreographer would make a dance to your measure. With Robbins, on the other hand, you would go into the studio and find a fantastic, wonderfully made jacket all ready for you to try on.

This month and next, N.Y.C.B. is offering three all-Balanchine and four all-Robbins programs. Additional hoopla will attend the company première of "2 & 3 Part Inventions," the Bach ballet that Robbins made last spring with students of the School of American Ballet in New York. Balanchinians should also note the return to the repertory of "The Four Temperaments: A Dance Ballet Without Plot." Set to Paul Hindemith's 1940 score for string orchestra and piano, and first performed in 1946, "The Four Ts," as insiders call it, is what modernity is all about.

New York City Ballet—Jan. 18 at 8: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo / Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Viola Alone," "Correlazione," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." . . . ¶ Jan. 19 at 8: "Ballo della Regina," "Concertino," "2 & 3 Part Inventions," and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3." . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 8: "Raymonda Variations," "2 & 3 Part Inventions," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 2: "Mozart Piano Concerto," "Correlazione," and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: "Ballo della Regina," "Concertino," "Ives, Songs," and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 1: "Correlazione," "Zakouski," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Agon." . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 7: "Raymonda Variations," "Ives, Songs," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: "Raymonda Variations," "Concertino," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo / Movements for Piano and Orchestra," and "The Concert." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through Feb. 26.)

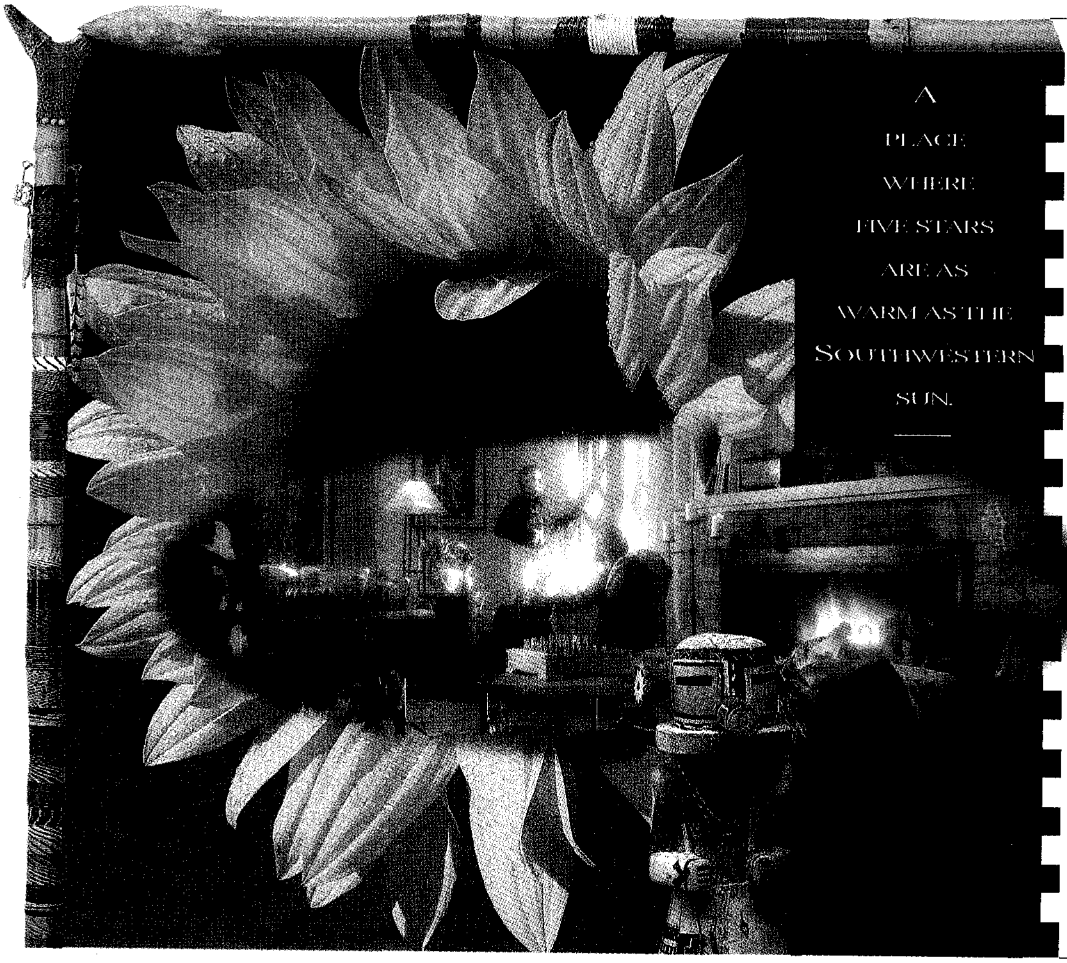
Twyla Tharp—The choreographer presents an evening-length piece, "Red, White & Blues" (created last summer in Washington, D.C.), in which she m.c.s the program and dances with a seven-member company from, as she says, "different parts of the dancers' earth." The score leaps around the map of Americana, from Five Satins doo-wop to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and from big-band swing to a polka tune titled "Circling Pigeons Waltz." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. Jan. 18-20 and Jan. 23-27 at 8, and Jan. 21 and Jan. 28 at 3 and 8.)

"Altogether Different"—A series of performances by several contemporary-dance companies, all presenting new works. Jan. 18 and Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 2: Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, in "Flying Into the Middle," with dancers whose ages range from twenty-three to seventy-one. (For information about Lerman's critical response workshop, see "Above and Beyond.") . . . ¶ Jan. 19 at 8: Sarah Skaggs Dance, in "Folked Up!," which draws on Czech and Slovak folk dance and Chinese dance, and "Higher Ground," during which audience members have been known to join the dancers onstage (though for this season other surprises are in the works). . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 8: Donald Byrd/The Group, in "Life Situations," an evening-length work. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

Molissa Fenley—The solo dancer performs "Sita" (première), with music by Philip Glass and photographs by Sandi Fellman; "Bridge of Dreams," with a Laurie Anderson score, choreographed last year for twenty-two dancers and presented here in Fenley's solo rendition; the 1993 work "Witches Float," with a score by Alvin Lucier and sculptures by Kiki Smith; and two short pieces. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Jan. 24 at 8. Performances continue through Jan. 29.)

Jennifer Monson—Monson's work, in which dancers melt bonelessly to the floor and rebound from it (or from one another) like so many Nerf balls, might not seem like the right match for Debussy's "La Mer." But the composer's ideas about nature and the imagination inspired the choreographer, and she says she is amazed that what she created is, in fact, a ballet—there's even a delicate pas de deux performed in hoop skirts. But don't expect decorousness. The "La Mer" is Zeena Parkins' arrangement, scored for electric and acoustic harp, turntables, drum machine, and trombone. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Jan. 19-22 at 9.)

National Ballet of Senegal—In "Pangols: The Spirit of West Africa in Music, Song, and Dance." (Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College, a block west of the corner of Flatbush and Nostrand Aves. 1-718 951-4500. Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 2.)



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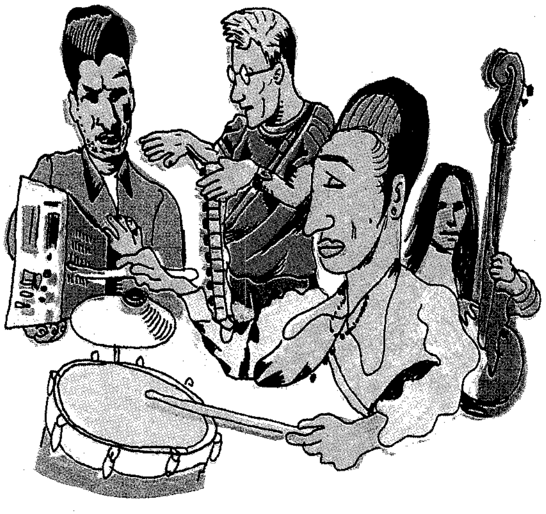
NIGHT LIFE

Wordland

LAST year we heard a slow, churning apocalypse of a song called "Screenwriter's Blues," by a downtown combo named Soul Coughing, on which a metaphor-crazed beatnik with a voice like Jack Webb raps about driving in Los Angeles at 5 A.M. ("... gone savage for teen-agers with automatic weapons and boundless love"). When we bought the band's début album, "Ruby Vroom," it turned out to be one of the best records of 1994: an impressive slab of tiny, insinuating melodies and skittering acid-jazz grooves overrun with obscure sound bites, phone conversations, Howlin' Wolf samples, and more puzzling allusions than the "Cantos" of Ezra Pound.

On January 21, Soul Coughing will take the stage at Wetlands (161 Hudson Street), so we asked M. Doughty, the quartet's front man, guitarist, and bard, to drop by the office for a chat. Doughty—a gangly bundle of nerves who looks like a Cubist version of Buddy Holly—is probably the only guy with a major record deal to have won a poetry slam at the Nuyorican Poets' Café, but he's modest about his writing: "I tell people the words don't mean anything, and they go, 'Oh yeah, cool, man'; then an incredible look of relief crosses their faces." His first New York job, back in 1990—before a brief gig as a rock critic for the New York *Press*—was collecting tickets at the door of the old Knitting Factory. "I keep meeting people who say, 'Hey, I remember you—*you made me pay!*' " We asked how he's adjusting to life on the other side of the spotlight, and apparently things haven't changed too much. He told us, "People still ask me where the bathroom is."



Soul Coughing, at Wetlands.

GARY PANTER

CONCERTS

ANDY STATMAN KLEZMER ORCHESTRA—Way before klezmer was hip, Statman was reaching back to the shtetls with his mournful clarinet and pushing forward to the New World with his mandolin fusions. When a man has honed his craft at bar mitzvahs and brisses, you know he's the real deal. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8719. Jan. 21 at 8.)

KENNY DAVERN QUARTET—Davern is the great champion of the swing clarinet, a superbly expressive stylist who can summon up the ghosts of Pee Wee Russell and Sidney Bechet without ever losing his own pungent, invigorating voice. (Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Ave. at 90th St. Jan. 22 at 5. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

STEVIE WONDER—The forty-four-year-old father of New Age funk is back in a big way—with a thirty-three-piece orchestra. A generation has grown up since he last released a killer album—"Hotter Than July," in 1980—and kids who know him only from saccharine jingles like "I Just Called to Say I Love You" are in for a surprise: his soon-to-be-released "Conversation Peace" is a tour de force of ballads, up-tempo funk, and (on a wonderful number titled "Sensuous Whisper") hip-hop jazz. Without forcing the point, the album makes it clear that Michael Jackson and Prince owe a large debt to Stevie Wonder. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Jan. 24-25 at 8.)

MARILYN CRISPELL/GERRY HEMINGWAY—The pianist and the percussionist. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 19 at 8.)

KAREN AKERS—A tall, slender model of cool whom moviegoers may remember as the Copacabana chanteuse in the "Purple Rose of Cairo." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 21 at 7:30.)

"LYRICS & LYRICISTS"—The annual series at the 92nd Street Y kicks off with a salute to the work of the songwriters Alan and Marilyn Bergman. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. Jan. 22 at 2:30 and 8 and Jan. 23 at 2 and 8.)

"PARTICULAR PEOPLE"—A tribute to the music of the late Donald Ashwander, the resident composer for the Paper Bag Players. The cast for this program includes Meredith Monk. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Jan. 19-21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 3:30 and 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

A.K.A., 77 W. Houston St., at Wooster St. (673-7325)—Hip-hop, jazz, and world beat meet in this small, velvet-draped club. Jan. 20: The **AUTHORITY.**

BLARNEY STAR, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night. Jan. 20 belongs to **MORNING STAR**, featuring Mary Courtney on guitar and bodhran (an Irish goatskin drum) and Margie Mulvihill Loughran on tin whistle.

BROWNIES, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (429-8392)—Jan. 18: **BABE THE BLUE OX**, a ferocious little trio that's sort of a cross between King Crimson and Primus. With the **VERY PLEASANT NEIGHBOR.**

CAFÉ SIN-É, 122 St. Marks Pl. (982-0370)—A small peach-walled storefront, usually given over to a young, sandals-and-socks sort of crowd. Jan. 18: Guitarist-singer **SONNY LANDRETH.** Jan. 20: Delightful folkie **RUTH GERSON** takes over. Jan. 22: The **BOSSA NOVA BEATNIKS.**

CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—Rock and roll always sounds best in a dump, which may be why this legendary club is still thriving. Jan. 20: **HALCION** entertains. Jan. 21: **JOAN OSBORNE**, one of the most distinct voices in rock. Osborne's aptly named CD, "Relish" (due in March), should finally make her a household name. Her bluesy growl is a throwback to such forgotten divas as Phoebe Snow, and her melodies stick in your head. . . . ¶ Next door, at CB's Gallery, the acoustic duo known as **BLUE** has the floor on Jan. 20.

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. Jan. 18: The **SHIRLEY JOHNSON BLUES BAND** wraps up a two-night stand. Jan. 21: The **HOLMES BROTHERS.** There's no meteoric rags-to-riches story here. After more than twenty-five years in the business, this impossibly great band finally made its first album in 1989. The Holmes Brothers play a different kind of world beat, and they have it all: blues, soul, gospel, R. & B., and country, along with a cool poise that lends the mix an authority that younger, looser groups can't touch. A must-see show.

CLEOPATRA SUPPER CLUB, 327 W. 44th St. (262-1111)—Live music, belly dancing, and an honest-to-God whirling dervish, every Wednesday through Sunday.

DUPLEX, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters, and the audience. The fabulous **DRESSING ROOM DIVAS** are in the house every Friday night.

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is a fine spot to take in a show. Jan. 21: Singer-songwriter **PIERCE TURNER.** On Jan. 24, **KIRSTY MAC COLL** performs on these shores for the first time in ages. MacColl is one of the first (and best) of the baby-voiced British singers. Back in 1989, her cherubic version of Billy Bragg's "A New England" became a minor hit, with a little help from her famous knob-twirler husband, Steve Lillywhite. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

FLANNERY'S, 205 W. 14th St. (929-9589)—A well-scrubbed, amiable Irish pub with many of the classic features (pints of Guinness, non-stop TV sports) and a few of the near-classics (a CD jukebox, a portrait of Elvis).

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—He's bad, he's nationwide—the invincible **TOM JONES** shimmies in on Jan. 20, fresh from his gig at Webster Hall. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday night, at the Continental Club. The dancers share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

KAPTAIN BANANA, 101 Greene St. (343-9000)—French cabaret *en travesti* in SoHo. Three drag queens and eight dancers re-create the Court of Versailles, a carnival in Rio, Marlene Dietrich, and the Andrews Sisters. There's also a singing gorilla. Dining.

LIMELIGHT, Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7850)—A church turned eighties hot spot, this unholy venue currently plays host to a variety of techno and alternative acts. Wednesday night is Disco 2000.

LUDLOW STREET CAFÉ, 165 Ludlow St. (353-0536)—An unassuming basement restaurant-bar, where you can drink cheap and catch live music nightly. Mondays belong to **BEAT RODEO**, a straight-shooting bar band that plays a mixture of country, blues, Dylan, Byrds, Velvets, and various pop curiosities.

MANNY'S CAR WASH, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—The Upper East Side blues. The ubiquitous funk merchant **MILO Z** swings by on Jan. 18, followed by **POPA CHUBBY**, on Jan. 19.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken. (1-201 798-4064)—Many of the bands that play here today will be playing somewhere more expensive tomorrow. **VELVET CRUSH** lays it down on Jan. 20.

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Beyond the long bar, you'll find an exposed-brick room and a stage packed with some very hip rock acts. Jan. 18: **JOAN OSBORNE** warms up for her show at CBGB. **WEEN**, last heard on "Chocolate and Cheese," an album of pure, hole-in-the-head weirdness, performs a special unplugged show here on Jan. 24. The chocolate of the title refers, presumably, to the band's flair for early-Prince-era R. & B., while the cheese relates to their taste for sophomoric humor. (One of the best tracks is "Spinal Meningitis Got Me Down.") In a world in which most bands give us everything but the kitchen sink, Ween gives us only the kitchen sink. A typical song includes two distorted guitars and a fairly lame drum track, with Dean and Gene ranting and raving and joking around on top. It may not sound like a winning formula, but much of "Chocolate and Cheese" is inspired, and you just can't stop listening.

Monkey Bar, 60 E. 54th St. (838-2600)—Beyond the monkey murals, there's a bright see-and-be-seen dining arena that's perfect for committing high-profile indiscretions in a strapless gown. But the place to be is the dark and crowded bar up front, by the grand piano, where the bar stools are shaped like plump olives. You perch on the pimiento. Dining.

Nell's, 246 W. 14th St. (675-1567)—A Victorian-style club, home to an eclectic crowd of downtown youngsters dancing to throbbing funk and techno-pop.

Paddy Reilly's Music Bar, 519 Second Ave., at 29th St. (686-1210)—**BLACK 47** plays on Saturdays, and Speir Mor (Gaelic for Big Sky) performs for a hearty following on Fridays. Séisiún—a traditional Irish jam—is on Thursday nights.

Les Poulets, 16 W. 22nd St. (229-2000)—The name may be French, but the music here is Latin: expect salsa, merengue, and, now and then, a cha-cha. Jan. 18: **CONJUNTO IMAGEN.** Jan. 21: **LOS HERMANOS MORENO.** Dining.

Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. (247-0200)—Ballroom dancing on Thursdays and Sundays. The rest of the week it's another dark, sweaty rock club, with flannel-clad stage divers and the occasional whirling mosh pit.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Jan. 18: Ska god **POPA JUBE.** Tuesday nights, S.O.B.'s presents Soul Kitchen, an evening of seventies funk and R. & B. for devotees of Don Cornelius. Thursday nights belong to Giant Step, a roving collective of musicians, rappers, and d.j.s who mix jazz, funk, and hip-hop. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—This spacious and agreeable club offers a consistent lineup of blues greats. Pompadoured rockabilly dude **ROBERT GORDON** hits the stage on Jan. 21. Original NRBQ guitarist **STEVE FERGUSON** opens the show.

Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—A byzantine disco wonderland with four floors, a coffee shop, and a wig boutique. Don't miss that panty magnet **TOM JONES,** here on Jan. 19. Even if you're not a fan of warmed-over seventies-style disco, Jones's new record "The Lead and How To Swing It," still deserves to be puchased, if only for the cover, which captures the woolly Welshman in full beefcake regalia: tight powder-blue slacks and a white mesh tank top. Wednesday (by contrast) is drag night. Psychedelic Thursdays feature grunge acts and cheap beer.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—**SOUL COUGHING** lights up this environmentally friendly club on Jan. 21, with **CIBO MATO,** a cutesy Japanese synth-and-vocal duo that's a regular on the downtown circuit.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **NANCY LA MOTT** is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

Arthur's Tavern, 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy and Johnny Parker, Fridays and Saturdays to the Freddy Francis trio, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. With his double bass drums churning the air into pudding, **LOUIE BELLSON,** who begins a five-night run on Jan. 24, is still the whirlwind he was when he first came to prominence in the Duke Ellington Orchestra, back in the early fifties—only now he's added composing, arranging, and bandleading skills to his exuberant virtuosity. Also appearing is the purring singer **HELEN MERRILL,** who will re-create the brassy textures of "Brownie"—her excellent tribute record to trumpeter Clifford Brown—with a hand from two hard-blowing hornmen: the ever underrated Lew Soloff and the up-and-coming Ryan Kissor. Dining.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Decent sight lines, great greasy food, prodigiously talented waitresses, and a consistent roster of high-quality acts. Jan. 19: The **UPTOWN HORNS** revue. **PAT MARTINO,** the archetypal guitarist's guitarist, here on Jan. 20-21, has won the admiration of three generations of jazz fretmen (and Jerry Garcia). Martino knows how to transform knowledge, technique, and ideas into genuine music—a notion lost on most guitar manglers.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—On any given night, and well into the morning, one or another of New York's many formidable pianists can be found here. The fleet, earthy, and experienced stylings of **MULGREW MILLER** may be the perfect foil for the incandescent tenor of **JAVON JACKSON,** a young hard bopper of the first order. They'll play together Jan. 15. Jan. 16-21: **LARRY WILLIS,** an overlooked piano man, is joined by vibist **STEVE NELSON** and the fine bassist **CURTIS LUNDY.** Jan. 22: Pianist **JONNY KING** is joined by bassist **LARRY GRENADIER** and saxophone sensation **JOSHUA REDMAN.** Dining.

Cajun, 129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (691-6174)—A New Orleans-style restaurant specializing in Dixieland and swing. On Fridays, catch the Canal Street Dixieland Jazz and Blues band. Saturdays belong to the New Atlantic Jazz band.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and—holy hotcakes, Batman!—the amazing **EARTHA KITT.** Kitt is still a fierce and funny performer with a feral grip on her audience. She inhabits her songs: when she sings "I Wanna Be Evil," you don't doubt for a second that she could spit tacks. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, the suave and sybaritic **KURT WIETING** is in attendance.

Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A cool, sumptuous piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel, with fine jazz seven nights a week. Wednesdays through Saturdays, **DONALD JOHNSTON** is the featured pianist; on weekends he performs with a trio. Dining.

Five Spot, 4 W. 31st St. (631-0100)—Set in a mammoth turn-of-the-century ballroom, this jazz club is all marble and gilt, with a few modern touches, such as the zebra-patterned carpet in the V.I.P. room upstairs. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Across the street from Lincoln Center, this restaurant and club features a handsome bar upstairs and a surreal performance space downstairs. Pianist **CEDAR WALTON,** who whoops it up for five nights beginning Jan. 24, is a New York institution—a neo-bop stylist so firmly in control that his graceful and dashing runs seem like second nature. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 22: Guitarist **DAVID TRONZO** accompanies a screening of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Jan. 23: The **DAVE TAYLOR** octet.

Match, 160 Mercer St. (343-0020)—This tragically hip SoHo *boîte* is the place to be every Sunday night, thanks to the **SHORTY JACKSON LEGACY BLUES BAND,** featuring the eighty-

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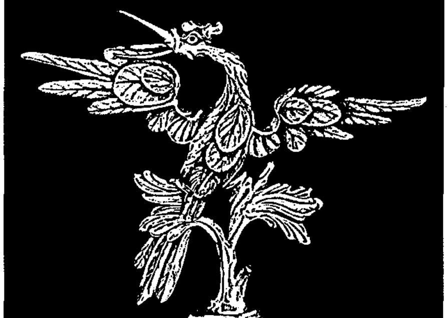

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NIGHT LIFE–Cont'd

something **LAUREL WATSON**, torch singer par excellence and the original (according to Doc Cheatham) "last of the red-hot mamas." Dining.

METROPOLIS, 31 Union Sq. W. (675-2300)—The basement of this swank café is now hosting a series of high-profile gigs. Still going strong at ninety-two, the saxophonist **BENNY WATERS**, here on Jan. 20-21, got his education in the big bands of yore. His warmth takes you back to a time when a musician's tone was as important as what got said. Tuesdays are given over to the **GEORGE GEE ORCHESTRA**, a seventeen-piece swing band.

MICHAEL'S PUB, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—The **JIMMY RYAN ALL-STARS** lay it down Tuesdays through Saturdays. On Mondays, Woody Allen continues his night job as clarinet player in the **NEW ORLEANS FUNERAL AND RAGTIME ORCHESTRA**, a Dixieland-jazz ensemble. Closed Sundays.

RAINBOW & STARS, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. The song-and-dance trio known as the **MANHATTAN RHYTHM KINGS** is currently appearing. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Michael Andrew and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

RED BLAZER TOO, 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—Thursdays belong to Stan Rubin's big band; Fridays to Lew Anderson's big band and the Kit McClure sextet; and Saturdays to Bob Cantwell and his Stompers.

SMALLS, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—A new contender in New York's ever-changing jazz topography, this aptly named club features young and up-and-coming players jamming late into the night.

SQUIRE, 216 Seventh Ave., at 23rd St. (727-8387)—Jan. 20: Saxophonist **JOHN BARNETT** leads a quintet.

TAVERN ON THE GREEN, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—This legendary tourist haven makes serious jazz fans welcome in its Chestnut Room, which resembles a hunting lodge and is every bit as over the top as the rest of the establishment. But the bookings are impressive. The **DOROTHY DONEGAN** trio is currently in the midst of a two-week run. Now in her seventies, Donegan can still scare your pants off with her wild, free-association piano discourses. She'll try anything, even the impossible, interpolating classical themes into Tin Pan Alley, slinging off Tatum volleys, and romping through stride passages when the spirit moves her. It's on-the-edge stuff, fun and life-affirming.

VILLAGE CORNER, 142 Bleecker St. (473-9762)—Jan. 23 belongs to **CAROL BRITTO**, whose scattered recordings attest to her skill and passion; mainstream piano has few finer practitioners.

VILLAGE VANGUARD, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—**JOE LOVANO**, here through Jan. 22, may not fit the current jazz-musician image, but this saxophonist still outshines the younger, slick-as-satin upstarts on the scene, and he's even regarded as something of an icon. Lovano began his career in the early seventies, apprenticing with two of the last existing big bands, Woody Herman's Thundering Herd and the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. But he wasn't immune to the musical tumult of the sixties—he absorbed the radical permutations of John Coltrane and a host of other experimenters into his sound. (He may be the only sax player who can evoke Stan Getz and Ornette Coleman simultaneously.) Lovano is a grand balladeer: his melodies float over the beat with unearthly grace, leaving behind a flavor of half-remembered melancholy. His exhilarating up-tempo solos rumble with gruff lines and urgent blues-inflected phrasing. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

East Dresses West

IN 1911, the French couturier Paul Poiret gave one of the parties of the century, a delirious extravaganza on Turkoman themes called "The Thousand-and-Second Night." It was the apogee of Orientalist fashion in the modern era. The turbans and aigrettes favored by many of the guests were typical of a whimsical Ottomania that had been showing up in Western dress since the eighteenth century, but it was Poiret's flared, or lampshade, tunic, which Mme. Poiret wore, that made fashion history that night. With this silhouette, the designer suddenly liberated Western women from the tyranny of the corset.

The lampshade tunic and some eighty additional examples of the creative confluence of Eastern and Western styles are on view in "Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress" (at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, through March 19). The show is a fashion freak's dream. While the curators occasionally tip their hats to political correctness (explanatory labels and catalogue essays refer to Western imperialism and to "otherness"), the prevailing tone is high spirited and celebratory. From eighteenth-century court gowns to sequinned flapper's shifts to the recent inspirations of Issey Miyake and Romeo Gigli, luxury and fantasy are the leitmotivs. It's better than a trip to Bendel's.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"The French Renaissance in Prints from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France." . . . ¶ "Greek Gold." Forget embarrassment—this is a *humiliation* of riches, as splendid an exhibition of Classical jewelry as we're ever likely to see. Choice items from the Met and the British Museum have been augmented with lovely pieces from the northern coast of the Black Sea—a rare loan from the Hermitage. One massive Crimean cuff bracelet terminates in a pair of exquisitely carved sphinxes, eye to eye. Button-size plaques in the form of golden cockerels, also from the Crimea, lend a note of whimsy. An oak-wreath crown, with a bee and two cicadas nestling in its branches, is as airy and fine as sunlight itself. The workmanship throughout is so delicate that you may want to bring a magnifying glass. Through March 26. . . . ¶ "Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress." Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300-1450." Through Feb. 26. . . . ¶ "Thomas Eakins and the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Through Feb. 26. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St.—"Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series," a sixty-panel work from 1941 that depicts black migration from the South to the North in the period between the two World Wars. (A concurrent show of Lawrence's work is at Midtown-Payson, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.) . . . ¶ "Rem Koolhaas and the Place of Public Architecture." The Dutch architect is best known in this country for his 1978 book "Delirious New York." Koolhaas prefers indeterminacy to logic and flux to form, so he sees freedom rather than alienation in the anonymous sprawl of the metropolis. This show focusses on the recent projects of the Rotterdam-based Office for Metropolitan Architecture (O.M.A.), which Koolhaas founded in 1974 with several colleagues. Some of O.M.A.'s buildings seem deliberately schizophrenic. The glass-curtain façade of the Rotterdam Kunsthal, for example, is an image of serene reduction straight out of Mies van der Rohe, but step inside and you're confronted with the skewed geometries of sloping ramps and precariously tilted columns. Through Jan. 31. . . . ¶ "A Century of Artists Books" includes more than a hundred and forty works by, among others, Baselitz, Albers, Matisse, and Ruscha, and collaborations by Redon/Flaubert, Derain/Apollinaire, Johns/Beckett, and Kruger/King. Through Jan. 24. . . . ¶ "An Eccentric Orbit: Video Art in Australia." (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-68." Chairs, typewriters, a case of fabulous shoes, a car, a vacuum cleaner—even some painting and sculpture. Although this massive exhibition, which examines the way Italy reinvented itself after the Second World War, sprawls around the rotunda with no real logic, it's a potent reminder of the impact that Italian art and design have had in the past half century. And it's a fun crawl. Through Jan. 29. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6, and Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Franz Kline: Black & White, 1950-61." Through March 12. . . . ¶ "Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney: Printmakers' Patron." Through March 12. . . . ¶ "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art." Through March 15. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—"Thomas Cole: Landscape into History," an exhibition of more than sixty paintings by the father of the Hudson River school, including the allegorical series "The Course of Empire" and "The Voyage of Life." (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St.—"Judith Leiber: The Artful Handbag." Every woman who has ever walked through one of New York's grander department stores must be familiar with the opulent whimsy of Ms. Leiber's notoriously pricey rhinestone-encrusted evening bags. Seeing so many of them in this noncommercial setting, displayed along with unobtrusively well-crafted purses in reptile and ostrich, forces one to recognize the art that goes into these glittering little fans, spheres, eggs and eggplants, tomatoes and roses, puppies, kittens, monkeys, horses, lions, bears, and Buddhas. Despite a strident and crackly video of interviews with Ms. Leiber and some of her notable customers, the show is enormous fun. Through March 11. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—"John Constable: Drawings, Watercolors, Oil Sketches, and Paintings from a Private Collection." Through Feb. 12. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Jewish Life in Tsarist Russia: A World Rediscovered." Through March 5. . . . ¶ "Mario Cavaglieri: The Glittering Years, 1912-22" features thirty-six paintings, both interiors and portraits. Through Jan. 29. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45; Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"The Thaw Collection: Master Drawings and New Acquisitions." The word "great" is overused in the art world: it should be reserved for occasions like this one. The collection ranges freely from Mantegna to Jackson Pollock, with all the major schools represented; the French drawings are especially fine. Through Jan. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—Decades before the advent of German Expressionism, the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918) was cooking up a strange brew of perfervid Romanticism and coloristic distortion. "Enchanted Boy II" (1894) captures Hodler's peculiar sensibility: a barefoot youth with a vaguely medieval hairdo stands in a field of blue flowers; he looks like an extra from "Parsifal." Through Jan. 22. . . . ¶ "An Installation of Works by Paul Cadmus." Through Feb. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

National Museum of the American Indian, 1 Bowling Green—The museum's exhibition space, the Heye Center (named for George Gustav Heye, the New York banker who in the first half of this century assembled a collection of a million artifacts from throughout the Americas), occupies two floors of the grand U.S. Custom House, at the foot of Broadway. The current exhibitions: "Creation's Journey: Masterworks of Native American Identity and Belief." . . . ¶ "All Roads Are Good: Native Voices on Life and Culture." . . . ¶ "This Path We Travel: Celebrations of Contemporary Native American Creativity." (Open daily, 10 to 5.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Garbage! The History and Politics of Trash in New York City." Through Feb. 25. . . . ¶ "e.e. cummings @ 100: An Anniversary Exhibition." (Open Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadow Park—The museum's Panorama of the City of New York is on view again, having been thoroughly updated and—unlike the original—repaired and swept clean. Imagine. . . . (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. The following lists lead off with new shows.)

William Baziotes (1912-63)—Paintings and drawings in the artist's favored style of biomorphic Abstract Expressionism, along with earlier, figurative works. Opens Jan. 18. Through March 4. (Blum Helman, 20 W. 57th St.)

Sam Francis (1923-94) / **Jack Tworkov** (1900-1982)—Large-scale paintings and small sketches by this Abstract Expressionist, who died in November. Opens Jan. 19. Through Feb. 18. / "A Decade of Painting: 1963-73" surveys Tworkov's shift from his peculiarly controlled Abstract Expressionist canvases to more minimalist works. Through Feb. 11. (Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St.)

Rolph Scarlett (1889-1984)—This small group of nonobjective works on paper from 1945 is given the awesome task of living up to the title "The Influence of Kandinsky on American Abstraction." Opens Jan. 18. Through Feb. 11. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St.)

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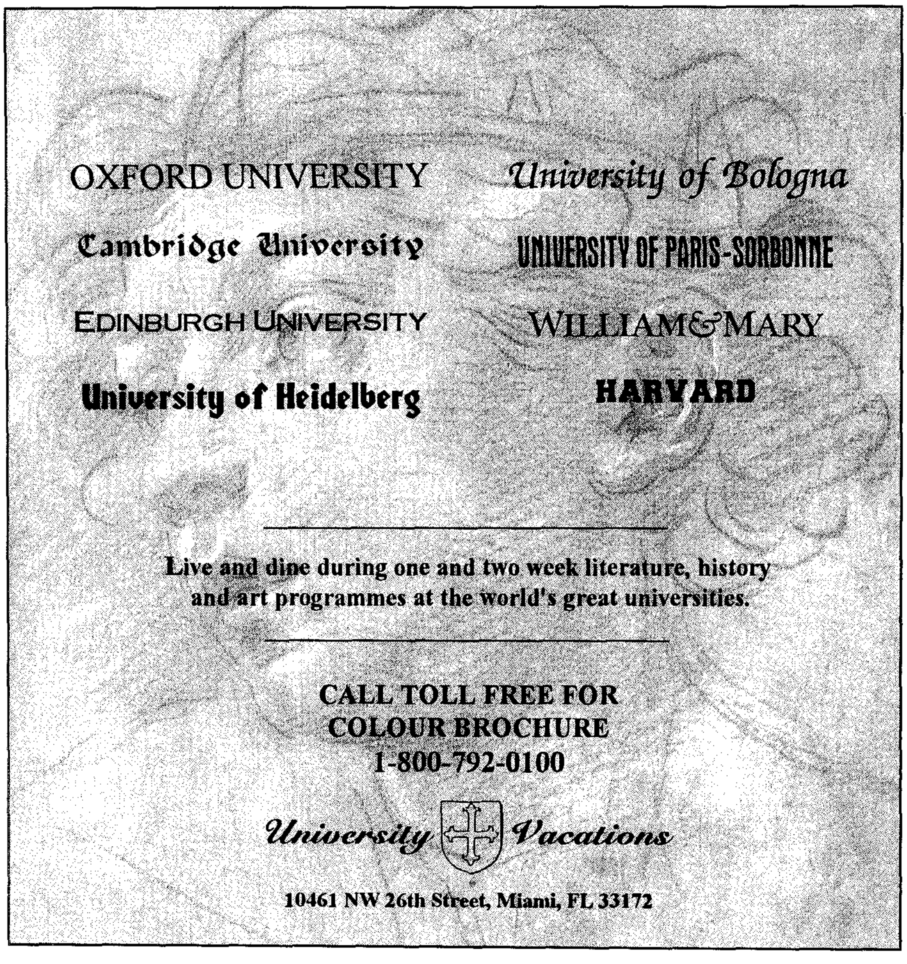
John Bellany—An exhibition of recent allegorical Expressionist works by a Scottish painter. Through Feb. 4. (Dintenfass, 50 W. 57th St.)

Louise Fishman—Thickly impastoed magazine-size paintings. Through Feb. 4. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St.)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ART—Cont'd

Alfred Jensen (1903-81)—Paintings from the mid-sixties. Through Feb. 11. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St.)

Jacob Lawrence—A retrospective of forty paintings, including several from the series "Struggle: From the History of the American People," and eight new works. Through Feb. 25. (Midtown-Payson, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. . . . ¶ The artist's sixty-panel work, "Migration Series," from 1941, is on view at the Museum of Modern Art.)

David Smith (1906-65)—Fifteen bronze reliefs depicting wartime evils. Through Jan. 28. (Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St.)

H. C. Westermann (1922-81)—A selection of works—wood sculptures, glass boxes, and bronzes—from the sixties. Through Jan. 28. (Frumkin-Adams, 50 W. 57th St.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Josiah McElheny / Dan Peterman—An installation of blown-glass works variously labelled "original," "replica," "fake," and "reproduction," in a critical history of glassblowing. / This artist's planks, made from recycled mass-consumer material, will cover the entire gallery floor. Opens Jan. 21. Through Feb. 25. (Rosen, 130 Prince St.)

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Phoebe Adams—Copper, wood, and felt floor sculptures, containing references to body parts and to literary works. Through Feb. 11. (Marcus, 578 Broadway.)

National Museum of the American Indian.

Eleanor Antin—A new film installation, titled "Minetta Lane—A Ghost Story." Through Feb. 18. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St.)

Richard Artschwager—"Large Drop Drop" (1991), a monumental aluminum exclamation point hovering over black granite. Through Feb. 25. (Kent, 67 Prince St.)

Alan Belcher—Using his own blood, hair, and nails, and other materials, the artist has tackled the self-portrait in this series of twenty-two handmade voodoo-like dolls. Each figure has a black-and-white photograph of Belcher's face stitched onto its head, which is topped with a tuft of his hair. Cloves of garlic, crystals, and coins act as hands and feet. By staining the dolls' chests with blood and fashioning breastplates out of fingernail clippings, Belcher has invoked the Surrealists' fetishism and their fascination with body parts. The dolls stand on pedestals, lie prone on tables, or hang pinned to walls; the over-all effect is delightfully, humorously macabre. Through Jan. 28. (Shainman, 560 Broadway.)

Mary Ellen Carroll—Among the works here is "A Modest Proposal"—eight white wool military blankets embroidered with a phonetically written version of Swift's acerbic essay. Through Feb. 11. (Tz'Art, 28 Wooster St.)

Yvonne Jacquette—Paintings and pastels showing aerial perspectives of night scenes in New York, Hong Kong, and Maine. Through Feb. 11. (Brooke Alexander, 59 Wooster St.)

Ellsworth Kelly—Most of these recent paintings are two-part reliefs in which each panel has been painted a different (often strikingly vibrant) color. The interaction of the simple, painted shapes produces a dazzling array of forms. Through Jan. 29. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

Tatsuo Miyajima—The artist has transformed a large room in this gallery into an arena for thirty small battery-operated cars that sport red or green LED counters, each of which ticks off the numbers one to nine at a different rate. The cars motor around the dark gallery, bouncing off each other and an ankle-high barrier, and producing a hypnotic sea of randomness. Through Feb. 11. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St.)

Carl Ostendarp—Large, flat, cotton-candy-colored paintings displaying a synthesis of color-field and Pop aesthetics. Through Feb. 4. (Gorney, 100 Greene St.)

Tim Rollins + K.O.S.—A new series of paintings inspired by the comedies of Aristophanes. Through Feb. 25. (Boone, 417 West Broadway.)

Dan Walsh—Large, spare acrylic paintings consisting of crisp yellow or black lines resembling musical staffs. The six canvases have an Agnes Martin-like simplicity and purity. Through Jan. 28. (Cooper, 155 Wooster St.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—The sale of items from the New-York Historical Society collection continues on Jan. 18 with some three hundred American and European paperweights. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

The Winter Antiques Show—The forty-first installment of this winter classic. In addition to perusing the offerings of leading dealers, visitors should check out the full-scale reproduction of a drawing room from Richard Jenrette's 1820 Hudson Valley mansion. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Jan. 20-21 and Jan. 23-28, from noon to 9; Jan. 22 and Jan. 29, from noon to 6. Tickets at the door.)

The "Other Armory" Antiques Show—A wide variety of wares, not quite rivalling the glamour (or the prices) of the more established uptown show. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. Jan. 20, from noon to 7; Jan. 21, from 11 to 7; and Jan. 22, from 11 to 5. Tickets at the door. . . . **Note:** A free shuttle bus will whisk antiquers between the two armories.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Fashion Plates

The enormous body of work that William Klein has produced since the middle of this century has made him a luminary in photography circles, if not in the eyes of the larger public. "In and Out of Fashion," a selection of his pictures on display at the International Center of Photography (Fifth Avenue at 94th Street; through February 26), is a suggestive exhibit rather than a satisfying overview, focussing, as the title suggests, on his fashion-related pictures. Some viewers will immediately ask, "Where's the other stuff?" The fact, though, is that there's so much going on in his best work that even a show restricted to a single aspect of it gives you a sense of his versatility: you see the satirist, the Surrealist, the editor, and the postmodernist—to name just a few of the Kleins on view. While most artists have learned that it's better for their reputations if they stick to a single genre, Klein has made a career of mixing them up. He has been an influential creator of books, a street photographer, and a film- and videomaker, not to mention a painter and an illustrator, and that refusal to be pinned down is what has always made him such a live wire.

In an accompanying videotape, the photographer tells war stories about his work in fashion, and they highlight the not-to-be-satisfied spirit that has nurtured the inventive approach obvious in his use of light, mirrors, design, and parody. He has a penchant for rule breaking, and he can break fashion taboos beautifully: consider his 1990 photographs, taken in a Paris bathhouse, of Roseanne-size women in bathing suits. There's nothing snotty about these photographs, though Klein isn't always above cheap shots (like using Charles and Di look-alikes). At times he can be too easy on himself (as his "colorful" shots of Africa show) and too hard on his subjects (the appreciative satire of his earlier pictures occasionally gave way to contempt later on). But the show has more memorable pictures than forgettable ones. Random House has recently published "William Klein: In and Out of Fashion," and other projects, with other perspectives on his work—including an exhibition of his street pictures, which opens this week at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art—are on the horizon.

S.W.I.M.

Debbie Fleming Caffery—Recent black-and-white photographs taken in Mexico. Opens Jan. 20. Through Feb. 25. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St.)

Arno Fischer—Documentary-style photos of West and East Berlin, made in the fifties. Opens Jan. 19. Through Feb. 25. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St.)

Minor White (1908-76)—Selections from throughout the career of this artist, who was a co-founder of *Aperture*. Opens Jan. 20. Through Feb. 25. (292 Gallery, 120 Wooster St.)

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Diane Arbus (1923-71)—Images shot inside Times Square movie houses between 1956 and 1958. Through Feb. 4. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St.)

Shimon Attie—Photographs of buildings and storefronts in Berlin, onto which the artist has projected images of Jewish life in that city from the years leading up to the Second World War. Through Feb. 11. (Klagsbrun, 51 Greene St.)

Lorna Bieber—This artist appropriates images, which she then alters and reconstructs, using everything from crayons to photocopiers. In making these new large-scale, unframed works, Bieber started with anonymous photos of suburban interiors and exteriors taken in the forties and fifties. Through Feb. 18. (Saul, 560 Broadway.)

Baron Adolf de Meyer (1869-1946) / **Toni Frissell** (1907-88)—A hundred and twenty vintage magazine and travel prints from throughout his career. / A large retrospective of black-and-white photographs by an artist who had tours of duty with *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and the Women's Army Corps. Through Feb. 12. (International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Benedict J. Fernandez—"The Last Campaign," pictures made during the last year of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s life. Through Feb. 15. (Leica, 670 Broadway. Opens Saturdays at noon.)

William Klein—A retrospective of the photographer's fashion work. Through Feb. 26. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Jacques Henri Lartigue (1894-1986)—"Flights of Fancy," a show of eighty-four photographs of dirigibles, hot-air balloons, bicycles with wings, seaplanes, and gliders. Through Jan. 20. (French Embassy, 972 Fifth Ave., at 78th St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Danny Lyon—Photographs spanning the artist's career, including photomontages of his family, unpublished vintage prints from the "Bikeriders" series, and documentation of the civil-rights movement. Through Feb. 25. (Lowinsky, 578 Broadway.)

László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946)—Photograms, montages, and straight (although not straight-perspective) photographs by the protean Constructivist. Through March 11. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

Cindy Sherman—Recent work that combines the familiar props—fake body parts, masks, mannequins, drapery—with such new techniques (for her) as multiple exposures and alternative developing processes. Through Feb. 18. (Metro Pictures, 150 Greene St.)

Paul Strand (1890-1976)—Vintage prints, with an emphasis on the photographer's later work. Through Feb. 4. (Burden, 20 E. 23rd St.)

Hiroshi Sugimoto—New work in which the artist returns to photographing dioramas. These still-lifes are peopled with various prehistoric, political, royal, and notorious figures. Through Feb. 4. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway.)

"Unfamiliar Exposures"—New work by ten contemporary photographers. Through Jan. 21. (Wessel O'Connor, 60 Thomas St., between West Broadway and Church St. Opens at noon.)

"Landmarks of New York"—Views of the city by Abbott, Coburn, Hine, Hofer, Kertész, Meyerowitz, and Ruzicka, among others. Through March 10. (Seagram Building, 375 Park Ave., at 52nd St., fourth floor. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Small Miracles

Although music that challenges the ear and the intellect too severely has passed out of fashion, Anton Webern's reputation is bound to hold up in the long run. Appreciation for his compact masterpieces has blossomed during the fifty years since he was killed in a postwar policing blunder, and his ultra-rarefied style has inspired a surprising array of musical creators, including all self-respecting serialists, many jazz modernists, and even the hard-to-please Stravinsky, who, assessing Webern's late music, could only repeat, "Dazzling . . . dazzling."

This week the Juilliard School launches a six-concert exploration of the composer's complete works, juxtaposing them with more recent compositions influenced by his example. Webern's own contributions to the programs are all Lilliputian. His first published piece is the only one of them that spans more than five minutes without a movement break; at a quarter hour, his late orchestral Variations (Op. 30) seems mammoth by comparison. The reigning recording of his œuvre (overseen by Pierre Boulez, on Sony Classical) falls a good deal shy of four hours. And yet considered as a whole, Webern's output displays an encyclopedic grasp of the ways that color and counterpoint can rival traditional tonality as principles of organization. The melodies, always twelve-tone after the mid-twenties, repay attentive listening. Often fragmented and distributed note by note among members of an ensemble, they exalt timbral variety rather than continuity. The works' very distillation is what makes them choice: a thimbleful of fine cognac, after all, imparts more flavor than a whole pint of cheap beer.

(The box-office number for the Metropolitan Opera House is 362-6000; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; and for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**Die Fledermaus**, with Gwynne Geyer, Harolyn Blackwell, Hanna Schwarz, Stanford Olsen, Anthony Laciura, Hermann Prey, and Wolfgang Brendel; conducted by Hermann Michael. (Jan. 18 and Jan. 21 at 8.) . . . **Simon Boccanegra**, in the opening performances of a new production, with Kiri Te Kanawa, Plácido Domingo, Vladimir Chernov, and Robert Lloyd; James Levine. (Jan. 19 and Jan. 23 at 8.) . . . **Le Nozze di Figaro**, with Carol Vaness, Dawn Upshaw, Delores Ziegler, Dwayne Croft, and Simone Alaimo; Mr. Levine. (Jan. 20 at 8.) . . . **L'Elisir d'Amore**, with Ruth Ann Swenson, Jerry Hadley, Lucio Gallo, and Paul Plishka; Edoardo Müller. (Jan. 21 at 1:30.) . . . With Ms. Swenson, Stanford Olsen, Mr. Gallo, and József Gregor; Mr. Müller. (Jan. 24 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House.)

ORCHESTRAS

New York Philharmonic—Leonard Slatkin conducts William Bolcom's "Commedia" and his Fifth Symphony, Ernst Toch's "Pinocchio,

IT SLEEPS ALONE

A FRUGAL AND ANONYMOUS SCOT, LONG YEARS AGO, observed that the oaken casks which had been used for bringing sherry, port, or madeira into the country, might be employed thereafter to mature malt whisky.

A PRIME NOTION IT TURNED OUT TO BE. The casks (particularly those that had contained sherry) imparted both a lustrous golden colour and a beguiling hint of redolence to the malt.

SO SUCCESSFUL WAS THE PRACTICE, in fact, that soon all the malt whiskies (among them The Macallan) were matured in this way. But time passed.

SHERRY CASKS ONCE TO BE HAD FOR A FEW PENCE NOW COST SCORES OF POUNDS. And first one and then another *faint-heart* settled for more expedient alternatives, with the result that today The Macallan is the last malt whisky to be *exclusively* so matured. However...

A PROFUSION OF OPTIMUM RATINGS IN SUNDRY 'BLIND' TASTINGS of top malts has convinced us of the wisdom of our solitary course. Putting it another way, you might say *our virtue is your reward.*

**THE MACALLAN.
THE SINGLE MALT SCOTCH.**

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CLASSICAL MUSIC–Cont'd

A Merry Overture," and Stravinsky's "Petrouchka." (Avery Fisher Hall. Jan. 19 and Jan. 21 at 8, and Jan. 20 at 11 A.M.)

Minnesota Orchestra—Edo de Waart conducting Mahler's Symphony No. 7. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 19 at 8.)

Filmic Frolic—A screening of the 1928 Charlie Chaplin silent "The Circus," with Gillian Anderson conducting the Manhattan School of Music Orchestra live, in a score that was arranged (under Chaplin's supervision) by Arthur Kay. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Jan. 20 at 8.)

Webern Festival—Opening events in Juilliard's annual Focus! Festival, which this year is devoted to the music of Webern and his followers. Jan. 20 at 8: Neal Stulberg conducts the Juilliard Orchestra in a program that includes Webern's Passacaglia (Op. 1), "Five Pieces for String Orchestra" (Op. 5), Variations for Orchestra (Op. 30), "Im Sommerwind," Three Orchestral Songs, "Five Pieces for Orchestra" (Op. 10), and Cantata No. 1 (Op. 29), as well as Stravinsky's "Movements for Piano and Orchestra." (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 8: A concert of solo and chamber works that includes several sets of Webern's songs (Op. 12, Op. 19, and an early group without opus number); his "Langsamer Satz," "Five Movements for String Quartet" (Op. 5), Five Canons (Op. 16), Six Bagatelles (Op. 9), and Concerto for Nine Instruments (Op. 24); and works by Stockhausen and Babbitt. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 7: A forum on Webern will include a 1932 recorded performance of the composer conducting his orchestration of Schubert dances. (Juilliard Theatre.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: Solo and chamber works, including several sets of Webern's songs (Op. 3, Op. 13, and Op. 18); his Piano Quintet, Four Pieces (Op. 7), Movements for String Trio, and Symphony (Op. 21); and Peter Westergaard's "Divertimento on Discobbolic Fragments." (Juilliard Theatre.) (For information about free tickets, which are required for all festival events, call 769-7406. Through Jan. 27.)

City Island Baroque Ensemble—Scott St. John is featured in Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5, and is joined by violist Ori Kam in Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante (K. 364). (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. Jan. 22 at noon.)

Met Orchestra—James Levine brings his orchestra out of the pit for an all-Strauss program: the Suite from "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," "Don Quixote" (featuring violist Michael Ouzounian and cellist Jerry Grossman), and, with soprano Margaret Price, the "Four Last Songs" and orchestral arrangements of Four Songs (Op. 27). (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 22 at 3.)

Riverside Symphony—George Rothman conducts the première of Matthew Greenbaum's "Split Voice," Haydn's Symphony No. 68, and Hindemith's Clarinet Concerto (with Alan R. Kay). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. Jan. 22 at 3. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 864-4197.)

Russian National Orchestra—At Avery Fisher Hall, Mikhail Pletnev conducting. Jan. 22 at 3: Grieg's "Peer Gynt" Suite No. 1, Haydn's D-Major Piano Concerto (in which the conductor doubles as soloist), and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 8: Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet" Suite and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 10.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra—Yoel Levi conducts Michael Torke's "Javelin" (intended as a reminder that the Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad will soon be enriching Atlanta's arts scene), Sibelius's Symphony No. 2, and, with mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, Chausson's "Poème de l'Amour et de la Mer" and three songs from Canteloube's "Chants d'Auvergne." (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 24 at 8.)

Concert Royal—The period-instrument ensemble offers suites from two of Purcell's masques ("King Arthur" and "The Gordian Knot Untied"), Corelli's F-Major Concerto Grosso (Op. 6, No. 6), Lully's incidental music to Molière's "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," and suites from Georg Muffat's "Florilegium Primum" and Biber's "Fidicinium Sacro-profanum." James Richman conducts. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8719. Jan. 24 at 8.)

Yoel Levi conducts the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

TIM BOWER

RECITALS

Tokyo String Quartet—The foursome plays Beethoven's quartets in E-Flat Major (Op. 127) and E Minor (Op. 59, No. 2). (Avery Fisher Hall. Jan. 18 at 8.)

Aimez-vous Brahms? et Schoenberg?—Pianist Emanuel Ax continues his season-long exploration of the links between Brahms and Schoenberg by serving as anchor in a program that comprises Brahms' Clarinet Trio and B-Major Piano Trio and Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony No. 1 (in Webern's reduced arrangement); with violinist Pamela Frank, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, clarinettist Paul Meyer, and flutist Eugenia Zukerman. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 18 at 8.)

Fuchs and Friends—Violinist Joseph Fuchs, who began his Juilliard studies in 1907 and joined the school's teaching staff in 1946, receives a ninety-fifth-birthday tribute from twenty-one of his current colleagues on the faculty and some of their students. On the program: several Bach arias, Dvořák's D-Minor Wind Serenade, Martinů's "Three Madrigals," and Bach's D-Minor Concerto for Two Violins (in which Mr. Fuchs will be featured along with Glenn Dicterow). (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Jan. 18 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Bargemusic—Fred Sherry and Ronald Thomas play Friedrich August Kummer's G-Minor Sonata for Two Cellos. Schubert's A-Minor String Quartet (D. 804) and String Quintet complete the program. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. Jan. 19 at 7:30 and Jan. 22 at 4.)

New York Festival of Song—Serving up a large helping of recently composed American songs, including works by Ricky Ian Gordon, Aaron Kernis, Chris deBlasio, Rob Maggio, Christopher Berg, James Sellers, John Musto, Jeffrey Stock, and William Bolcom (his "McTeague Suite," six excerpts from his opera of the same name). (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 19 at 8.)

Janet Packer—Violinist, performing Vittorio Rieti's "Rondo Variato," Vagn Holmboe's "Haiduc," Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata, and Stravinsky's Divertimento; with pianist Orin Grossman. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. 242-4770. Jan. 19 at 8.)

Mireille Lagacé—The organist plays music by Bach, Franck, Dupré, and others. (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. 921-2939. Jan. 20 at 8.)

Alaria Chamber Ensemble—In a program that includes Hindemith's "Variations on 'A Frog He Went A-Courting,' " Mozart's C-Major Violin Sonata (K. 296), Nicolas Chédeville's G-Minor Sonata from the collection "Il Pastor Fido" (formerly misattributed to Vivaldi), and Dvořák's "Dumky" Trio. (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 20 at 8.)

"Winterreise"—Two master lieder singers take their turns this week with Schubert's hivernal cycle. Jan. 20 at 8: Tenor Peter Schreier, with pianist Alexei Lubimov. (Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 3: Baritone Håkan Hagegård, with pianist Warren Jones. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050.)

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—Performing the première of "The Glorious Ensemble," the final work of the late Vittorio Rieti, as well as Haydn's G-Major Cassation (Hob. II, No. 1) and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Cantor Auditorium, Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway. Jan. 22 at 2. For information about tickets, call 212-840-7470. . . . ¶ Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 24 at 8.)

Anonymous 4—The women's vocal quartet performs music from the twelfth-century Codex Calixtinus, a compendium of devotional works sung by pilgrims along the route to Santiago de Compostela. Presented by Music Before 1800. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Jan. 22 at 4.)

Orlando String Quartet—The foursome plays quartets by Mozart (in E-Flat Major, K. 428), György Kurtág (his "Twelve Microludes"), and Schubert (the "Death and the Maiden"). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Jan. 22 at 5.)

Salon Soirée—Violinist Ya'akov Rubinstein, violist Ori Kam, and cellist Iris Regev perform string trios by Beethoven and Dohnányi. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Jan. 22 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Edmund Battersby—Pianist, performing Beethoven's E-Flat-Major Sonata (Op. 7), Chopin's Fourth Ballade, and short works by Schubert and Schumann, on a replica of an early-nineteenth-century Viennese instrument. (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 22 at 8:30.)

Borromeo String Quartet—Playing Bartók's Quartet No. 1, Janáček's Quartet No. 1 (the "Kreutzer Sonata"), and Schumann's A-Major Quartet. (Walter Reade Theatre, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. Jan. 23 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Evgeny Kissin—The pianist performs Haydn's Sonatas in A Major (No. 30) and E-Flat Major (No. 52), Beethoven's C-Sharp-Minor Sonata (Op. 27, No. 2, the "Moonlight"), Franck's "Prélude, Choral et Fugue," and both books of Brahms' "Paganini" Variations. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 23 at 8.)

Kyoko Saito—Soprano, with pianist Dalton Baldwin, in a recital of songs by Gounod, Strauss, Korngold, Debussy, Chausson, Poulenc, Kosaku Yamada, Ikuma Dan, and Yoshinao Nakada. Presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 24 at 8.)

FOR KIDS

(Accompanied by parents or other adults.)

Making a Joyful Noise—A pair of concerts for young music lovers. Jan. 21 at 1: The Children's Promenade takes concertgoers through Avery Fisher Hall's Grand Promenade to meet the brass section of the New York Philharmonic. At 2, the orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, performs Bolcom's "Commedia" and Stravinsky's "Petrouchka," in which the brass play a prominent role. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5656.) . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 1: Mozart's "The Magic Flute," with the Puppetworks marionettes and the chamber-music ensemble Sylvan Winds. (Trinity School, 101 W. 91st St. 249-8835. Jan. 22 at 1.)

"Freedom Train"—Theatreworks/USA presents a musical about Harriet Tubman, the escaped slave who returned to lead others north to freedom on the Underground Railroad. (Promenade Theatre, Broadway at 76th St. 677-5959. Jan. 21 at 12:30 and Jan. 22 at 10:30 and 12:30.)

"The Prop Shop"—When the members of the TADA! ensemble start rummaging around in their costume closet for old hats, they wind up singing favorite old songs instead. With selections from the TADA! musicals "Maggie and the Pirate," "Robyn & Roadie's Super Holiday World," and "Wide-Awake Jake," among others. (TADA! Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 627-1732. Jan. 20 at 7:30 and Jan. 21-22 at 1 and 3. Through Jan. 29.)

" 'Rubbish!' She Cried"—The Paper Bag Players turn old cardboard and paper into comedy, in a musical that toys with the silliness hidden in everyday trash. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Jan. 21-22 at 2. Through March 5.)

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers—For a while, it looked like this popular live-action sextet would be the only Rangers team to play in New York this winter. Expect a lot of rocketing around in helmets and quattrocento-style tights. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 307-7171. Jan. 18-19 at 6, Jan. 20 at 4 and 7, and Jan. 21-22 at 1, 4, and 7.)

Professor Putter—The magician in the guise of an inventor will demonstrate his brand of road-show science out of a "gadgetorium" suitcase. (West End Gate Children's Theatre, 2911 Broadway, at 113th St. 662-8830. Jan. 21 at 1:30.)

"Time and Tide"—This play about a family from an East Yorkshire fishing village, who meet a travelling theatre troupe on the beach, was written by Jennifer Fell Hayes, playwright-in-residence at the City Lights Youth Theatre at City Center; the teen-age actors are students from her fall performance classes. (Ubu Repertory Theatre, 15 W. 28th St. 262-0200. Jan. 20-22 at 7:30.)

Bomba Borinqueña—The multi-member ensemble Los Pleneros de la 21 kicks off the World Music Institute's world-music survey with a family concert of bomba and plena music from Puerto Rico. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510. Jan. 22 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Subway Reading—The last time the old I.R.T. station at City Hall was open to the public was New Year's Eve, 1945; since then its only regular visitors have been empty No. 6 trains, turning from the southbound to the northbound track, and, lately, Thom Harrington, curator of the New York Transit Museum. Mr. Harrington leads tours through the ghost station, with its patented timbrel-vault construction, leaded-glass arches (tarred over during the Second World War for air-raid safety), and Beaux-Arts details. He is full of the kind of lore that could pass the time during an interminable commute (for example: the Astors made their fortune in the fur trade—hence the beaver logo at their eponymous subway stop). Space is limited, as it always is in the subway, but if you can't make this tour, there's another a month later. (Leaves from the Transit Museum, Schermerhorn St. at Boerum Pl., Brooklyn. Jan. 22 at 10. For information, call 1-718 330-5839.)

Speak No Evil—Choreographer Liz Lerman, whose company appears this week in the Altogether Different series at the Joyce, presents an afternoon workshop in critical response. It's geared to dancers presenting works for peer review, but Lerman's system, a result of her experience as both the critic and the criticized, prescribes a kind of carefully neutral commentary that could also be applied to other art forms. The goal is not to defang the critic but to make the analysis useful to the artist. Participants will watch three works in progress, then apply Lerman's six steps of critical response. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Jan. 21 at 12.)

Walks—Jan. 19 at 12:30: Architectural historian John Kriskiewicz brings his tour in from the cold, with a stroll through Midtown's public lobbies, atriums, and arcades. The tour begins in the lobby at 630 Fifth Ave., at 51st St., behind the statue of Atlas. For information on Municipal Arts Society tours, call 935-3960. . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at noon: Big Onion Walking Tours traces the Italian-immigrant experience with a tour of Ellis Island. For information, call 439-1090.

Readings—Jan. 18 at 6:30: The Selected Shorts reading series opens, with Pauline Flanagan, Blair Brown, Paul Hecht, and Sydia Cedeño reading short stories by Dylan Thomas, Joyce Carol Oates, Octavio Paz, and Julia Alvarez. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) . . . ¶ Jan. 18 at 8: Fez, the club inside the Time Café, hosts "Queer Writers in Performance." The six Q.W.I.P.s include Dominique Dibbell of the Five Lesbian Brothers and Carmelita Tropicana. (380 Lafayette St. 533-7000.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: Poet and polemicist Katha Pollitt reads from "Reasonable Creatures," her collection of essays. (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—Jan. 19 at 6:30: National Book Award winners William Gaddis (fiction), Sherwin B. Nuland (nonfiction), and James Tate (poetry) discuss the writing life. (New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. Tickets, which are free, must be reserved in advance. For information, call 685-0261.) . . . ¶ Jan. 19 at 8: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., will give a talk, "Blacks and Jews: Common Sense, Common Ground," at the Jewish Theological Seminary. (Broadway at 122nd St. Tickets, which are free, must be reserved in advance. For information, call 678-8802.) . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 2: Four teachers back from yearlong residencies in China discuss student reactions to the country's upheavals. (Brecht Forum, 127 W. 27th St. For information, call 242-4201.)

And Don't Forget—The Poet's Voice, the National Public Radio series in which sundry recorded readings by and interviews with thirteen poets are aired in separate half-hour broadcasts, continues this week with the reedy voice of the Jersey pediatrician William Carlos Williams. Blair Brown narrates. (Jan. 21 at 10 P.M., on WNYC AM, and Jan. 22 at 3:30, on WNYC FM. The weekly broadcasts continue through April 2. For information, call 669-7748.)

SPORTS

MEN'S BASKETBALL

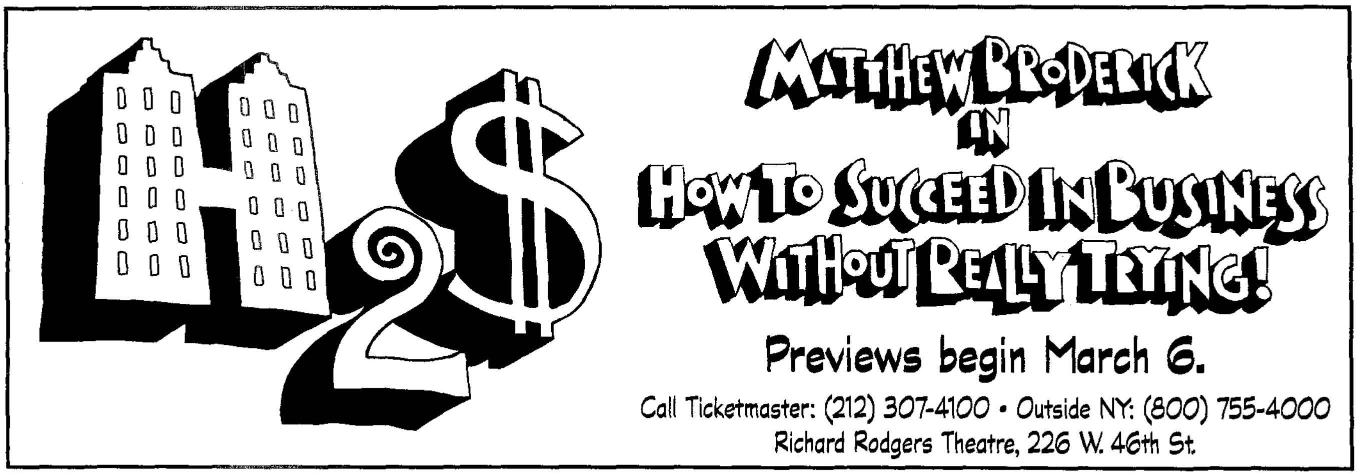
Knicks—Vs. the Portland Trailblazers, Jan. 24 at 7:30.

Nets—Vs. the Washington Bullets, Jan. 22 at 2.

(The Knicks play at Madison Square Garden, 465-5867, and the Nets at the Meadowlands Arena, 1-201 935-3900.)

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

The Prime-Time Converse Players—The eight-member squad, led by former St. John's star Jackie Smith, would gladly play a regular schedule of games in a league of their own, if one existed. In the meantime, Converse for Women, their sponsor and shoe supplier, has arranged an exhibition. On Jan. 21 at noon, after a cheerleading routine (by the Longwood High School team, national champs), a brief fashion show, and an aerobics demonstration with basketball-style moves, the eight women will take the court, divide their forces, and play. (A & S Plaza, Sixth Ave. at 33rd St., level C2. For information, call 239-0990.)



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THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Bad Company—Ellen Barkin plays an industrial spy, and Laurence Fishburne is the C.I.A. agent who infiltrates her espionage ring, in a movie directed by Damian Harris. With Frank Langella, Michael Beach, and Gia Carides. Written by Ross Thomas. Opening January 20. (Village Theatre VII, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy 1.)

Germany Year 90 Nine Zero and **JLG By JLG**—A double bill of Jean-Luc Godard films: a 1991 sequel to "Alphaville" (1965), about life in East Berlin after Communism, starring Eddie Constantine; and an autobiographical film made in 1994. The former is in French and German, the latter in French. Opening January 20. (Little Theatre.)

Mamma Roma—The American theatrical première of Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1962 drama. Set in postwar Rome, it features a legendary performance by Anna Magnani as a prostitute who has bourgeois aspirations in spite of a lazy son (Ettore Garofolo) and a demanding pimp (Franco Citti). In Italian. Opening January 18. (Film Forum.)

Murder in the First—Kevin Bacon, Christian Slater, and Gary Oldman, in a drama based on the Second World War-era murder trial of Henri Young, who had been convicted of theft and imprisoned at Alcatraz in the late nineteen-thirties. Directed by Marc Rocco. Written by Dan Gordon. Opening January 20. (Village East Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

S.F.W.—A satire about a disaffected twenty-year-old (Stephen Dorff) who becomes a national celebrity after terrorists hold him and two friends hostage in a convenience store. Directed by Jefery Levy; written by Danny Rubin and Levy from the 1990 novel by Andrew Wellman. Opening January 20. (Waverly and Criterion Center.)

Strawberry and Chocolate—A comedy set in Havana, in which Vladimir Cruz plays a straitlaced student who befriends a flamboyant gay artist (Jorge Perrugoria). With Mirta Ibarra and Francisco Gatorno. Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea ("Memories of Underdevelopment") with Juan Carlos Tabio. Written by Senel Paz, based on his 1990 short story "The Wolf, the Forest, and the New Man." In Spanish. Opening January 20. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre addresses and phone numbers are listed on page 24.)

Brother Minister: The Assassination of Malcolm X—A documentary about the 1965 murder of the controversial Nation of Islam leader. Written and directed by Jack Baxter and Jefri Aalmuhammed. (57th St. Playhouse.)

Camilla—The late Jessica Tandy has the title role in a movie about an elderly woman searching for a lost love (Hume Cronyn). Bridget Fonda plays Camilla's new friend and inspiration. Directed by Deepa Mehta. (Village East Cinemas.)

Death and the Maiden—Roman Polanski has had a career of alarming symmetry: the spectacular rise from "Knife in the Water" to "Chinatown," then the steady decline from "The Tenant" to "Bitter Moon"—and now this: Ariel Dorfman's fashionable, overblown stage play turned into a flat, uninspired thriller. The situation, involving a triangle of sex and suffering, sounds like classic Polanski, but the director seems oddly adrift from his material; the perverse, obsessive vigor of his younger years is gone. The ridiculous plot unfolds at a remote seaside house in an unnamed Latin-American country. An attorney (Stuart Wilson) and his wife (Sigourney Weaver) receive a visit from one Roberto Miranda (Ben Kingsley). The wife, convinced that Miranda is the man who tortured and raped her during their country's era of oppression, determines to get her own back; but all she has to go on is his voice, and the movie titillates us with the possibility that she has the wrong man. A more vulgar director—and less serious performers—might have had the nerve to admit that this is schlock posing as moral philosophy, but Polanski and his cast honor the self-importance of the script, and the result is fairly unwatchable.—A.L. (1/16/94) (Village Theatre VII and Paris.)

Disclosure—In Barry Levinson's movie version of the Michael Crichton best-seller, Michael Douglas plays an executive whose livelihood is threatened by his sexually predatory new boss (Demi Moore). The presence of Douglas, who has made a career of being pursued by beautiful, dangerous women, turns this sexual-harassment thriller into instant camp. Once again, he's the poster boy for men's fear of aggressive women—the Clarissa Harlowe of male-backlash cinema. In the picture's floridly silly centerpiece scene, Moore jumps his bones in her new office and he struggles manfully, showing us the hairy chest beneath the hero's ripped bodice. Once that hilarious encounter is over, the movie gets ordinary in a hurry; it's tasteful, bland, and only mildly entertaining.—T.R. (12/19/94) (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

Dumb and Dumber—Stipulated: Jim Carrey, as an easily distracted limo driver, and Jeff Daniels, as a dim dog groomer, are a first-rate pair of baggy-pants Gumps—they can double you over with a straggly line reading, a deadpan that betrays no mental pulse, or a semi-schizophrenic grin. But the screenplay for this deliberately over-the-top (under-the-bottom?) farce—about Carrey's unwitting retrieval of some ransom money and his effort to return it to his dream gal (Lauren Holly) in Aspen—doesn't pass muster as a string of moronic skits (studded with urine and fart jokes) or as a lampoon of buddy movies. The director, Peter Farrelly (who co-wrote with his brother Bobby Farrelly and Bennett Yellin), slips on his own comic puddles.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

Far from Home: The Adventures of Yellow Dog—Phillip Borsos wrote and directed this movie, about a fourteen-year-old boy (Jesse Bradford) who, stranded in the wilderness of the Pacific Northwest, relies on his Labrador retriever for survival. With Bruce Davison, Mimi Rogers, and Tom Bower. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Manhattan Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 23rd St. West Triplex, Lincoln Square, and National Twin.)

Higher Learning—Writer-director John Singleton's third movie (after "Boyz N the Hood" and "Poetic Justice") centers on three freshmen (Kristy Swanson, Michael Rapaport, and Omar Epps) on a university campus.

With Ice Cube, Laurence Fishburne, and Jennifer Connelly. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

Houseguest—Big-screen sitcom or political parable? On the anti-Newt side, the hero is raised in an orphanage and becomes addicted to get-rich-quick schemes. On the pro-Newt side, the orphan makes his fortune by writing the autobiographical "Handbook for the Houseguest." Sinbad plays an urban trickster who convinces a gullible suburban family man (Phil Hartman) that he's a boyhood friend. It's a star vehicle in which the vehicle runs over the star. With the screenwriters (Michael J. Di Gaetano and Lawrence Gay) fumbling simple scenes, and a director (Randall Miller) bursting them to smithereens, Sinbad's surprises have no taking-off point and no destination. Co-starring Kim Greist—and McDonald's.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, Orpheum VII, and 84th Street Sixplex. . . . ¶ Embassy 1; through Jan. 19. . . . ¶ Embassy; starting Jan. 20.)

I.Q.—Half a great movie. For the first hour, Fred Schepisi's new comedy hits a high note of tolerant goofiness. Walter Matthau as Albert Einstein, Meg Ryan as the physicist's niece, Stephen Fry as her intended, Tim Robbins as her garage-monkey love interest: with a cast like that, it's not hard to keep the movie kicking along, and the blooming backdrop of nineteen-fifties Princeton adds to the sensation that these guys are living through an age of innocence and making the most of it. Schepisi fools around nicely with the contest between logic and love; Einstein and his cronies hatch a plan to bring Robbins and Ryan together, thus assisting an already benign universe. The jokes never blast; they feel subtle and syncopated, hitting you at quiet moments, staying away from the main rhythms of the plot—a wise move, because the plot (never strong to begin with) soon starts to crack. By the end, it's in total collapse, and the good mood dissolves.—A.L. (12/26/94-1/2/95) (Village East Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, East 85th Street, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Embassy; through Jan. 19.)

Ladybird, Ladybird—A poor, abused mother (Crissy Rock) leaves her four children alone in a women's refuge on a night that fire breaks out. Social workers take the kids away and later refuse to let her keep two babies she has with a gentle Paraguayan (Vladimir Vega). Gripping but limited, this factually based account of her futile custody fights, written by Rona Munro, epitomizes the downbeat realism of the director, Ken Loach. Although he criticizes the mother for giving in to anger (and resists demonizing the social workers even when they betray class bias), the way Loach shapes the material suggests that he gets off on her rage. The movie becomes one paroxysm after another. Because it's so fatalistic, you're flabbergasted when the end titles announce that the couple retained custody of three future babies.—M.S. (Film Forum.)

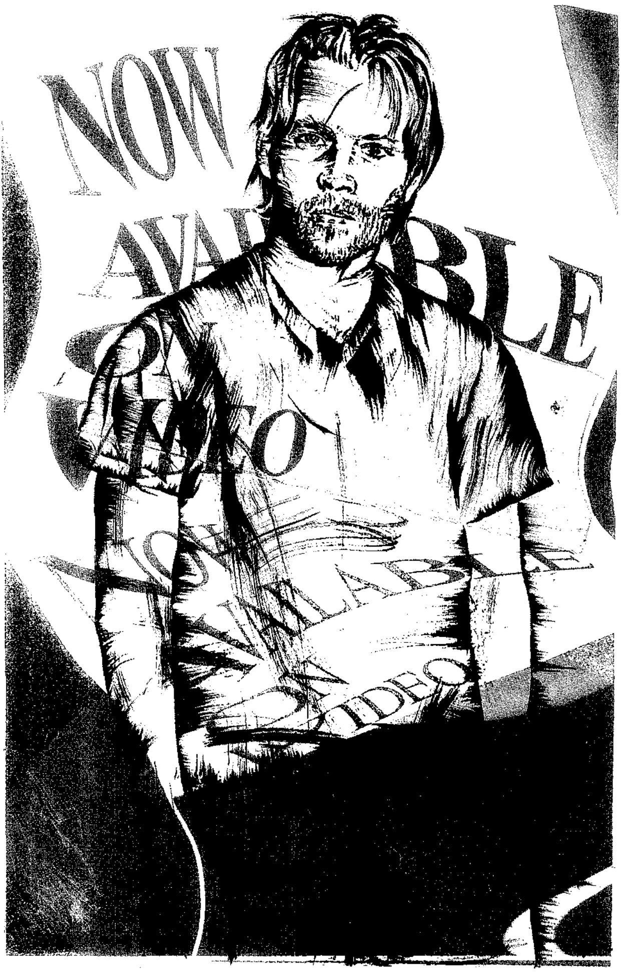
Legends of the Fall—Edward Zwick's film, based on Jim Harrison's brawny novella, is a father-and-sons saga, in which three handsome brothers (Brad Pitt, Aidan Quinn, Henry Thomas) compete for the approval of a stern patriarch (Anthony Hopkins). At first, the picture plays like "East of Eden" with a bonus brother; it gets sillier as it goes. Halfway through, Pa suffers a stroke, and Hopkins' performance turns into a mad music-hall impersonation of a peg-leg pirate. He squints, he hobbles, he bellows incomprehensibly, and his outrageous scenery-chewing reveals the movie's true nature: it's the Monty Python version of "Bonanza."—T.R. (1/9/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th St. East, Beekman, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, and Lincoln Square.)

Little Women—Gillian Armstrong's movie is more naturalistic—less storybooklike—than the previous screen versions of Louisa May Alcott's novel about a poor but noble New England family in the eighteen-sixties. In this rendering, the Marches—mother, father (mostly absent), and four daughters—inhabit a coherent, fully realized world. It's a deceptively audacious picture. Armstrong and the screenwriter, Robin Swicord, treat Alcott's familiar coming-of-age saga as if it were the story of American culture's coming of age, and, amazingly, they make their grand conception stick. Winona Ryder, as the aspiring writer Jo, gives a luminous performance; she shows us that even this remarkable young woman comes out of a family, and out of a society. Also with Susan Sarandon, Trini Alvarado, Claire Danes, Kirsten Dunst, Samantha Mathis, Christian Bale, Gabriel Byrne, and Mary Wickes.—T.R. (1/9/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

The Madness of King George—Alan Bennett's stage play has moved to the screen, with the same star (Nigel Hawthorne), the same director (Nicholas Hytner), and the same story, about the King of England's decline, in the years 1788-89, from cheerful disciplinarian to lewd, unsleeping ranter. His behavior, unacceptable even by the notorious standards of the monarchy, troubles his ministers, upsets his wife (Helen Mirren, underused), and puffs up the ambitions of his scurrilous son (Rupert Everett, overweight). It's a fine dramatic predicament—and that's how it stays, never really pressing forward or pulling us into a plot. The sovereign recovers, and the drama resolves itself without much fuss, though with more triumphal pomp than is required. This reactionary softness tends to blunt Bennett's pointed ironies, but there is plenty of relish here—in Ian Holm's fierce turn as a country physician, and in Hawthorne's blend of thundering and whimpers.—A.L. (1/16/94) (Angelika Film Center, 19th Street East 6, Baronet, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Nell—The title character of Michael Apted's film is a young woman (played by Jodie Foster) who has been brought up in a remote cabin in the North Carolina woods, and who speaks a private language. The filmmakers set up an irresistible human mystery, but the closer they get to Nell the less interesting she becomes; by the time it's over, the picture is speaking a language no one could understand. The heroine, bathed in romantic moonlight, turns into a one-woman pagan idyll, while remaining stubbornly asexual. Foster's performance, full of trick vocal effects and stylized gestures, is abstract and ultimately baffling. As you watch her swaying and gyrating sensuously to the rhythms of nature, you can't help wondering how this backwoods hermit managed to pick up all that classy Martha Graham technique. With Liam Neeson, Natasha Richardson, and Richard Libertini.—T.R. (12/19/94) (Murray Hill Cinemas, Coronet, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, and Regency.)

Nobody's Fool—Paul Newman plays Sully, a divorced, erratically employed construction worker in a dingy upstate New York town. Robert Benton's movie (based on a novel by Richard Russo) is essentially a series of low-key comic vignettes in which the hero, who presents himself as an ornery, self-sufficient loner, tries to deal with the exasperating presence of other people: irritable neighbors, demanding friends, disappointed family members. Not much happens, but the movie bobs along amiably to the rhythm of Newman's dry, deeply funny performance, and the tiny pleasures accumulate like the snow that covers the town. By the end, even the picture's dogged uneventfulness seems like a virtue. Benton doesn't oversell the significance of his characters' mundane problems, and he winds up giving us something unusual—a graceful and accurate depiction of everyday life in an old, cold place. The terrific supporting cast includes Bruce Willis, Melanie Griffith, Jessica Tandy, and Gene Saks.—T.R. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Tower East, Guild, and Lincoln Square.)



Opening January 20, Stephen Dorff in "S.F.W."

KEVIN PYLE

Pulp Fiction—In Quentin Tarantino's new picture, John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman, Tim Roth, Harvey Keitel, Christopher Walken, and Bruce Willis parade through two and a half hours of complicated, cross-weaving Los Angeles plots, some of which are more gripping than others; the talk is dirty and funny, the violence always waiting just around the corner. It's a bright and startling picture, but the next day, it seems like a dream: the film attacks your senses and gives you almost nothing to remember it by, let alone to nourish you.—A.L. (10/10/94) (Village East Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy.)

Queen Margot—Blood and guts and other kinds of

CURRENT FILMS—Cont'd

fun. Patrice Chereau's historical epic is often silly, but it never slows down long enough to make a real fool of itself. The place and period—Paris in 1572, when power was maintained by a combination of incest, poison, and blind faith—are unimprovable. Isabelle Adjani plays Margot, the suspiciously close sister of the King of France (Jean-Hugues Anglade), the daugher of Catherine de Medici (an iron-willed Virna Lisi), and the unwilling wife of Henri of Navarre (Daniel Auteuil). Chereau digs deep into the muck of religious politics and the filth of Paris; unfortunately, when it comes to sixteenth-century faces, his realism runs dry. (Margot steps out to look for her lover and appears to be wandering through ranks of male models.) The movie lacks a commanding performance at its heart; the actors weep and strut, but none of them can match Chereau's passion. His love of flame against darkness is infectious, and his choreography of the massacre of the Protestants on St. Bartholomew's Day is vicious and rousing. It's good to see a costume picture that refuses to be well behaved. In French.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center and Cinema II.)

Ready to Wear (Prêt-à-Porter)—Robert Altman turns his roving eye to the world of fashion. It should have been a perfect match of style and subject, but Altman seems to have decided in advance that the subject was barely worth his attention. Set amid the anarchy of Paris fashion week, the movie is so well oiled that it never snags on anything substantial, slipping from one micro-plot to the next without pausing to wonder where the center of interest lies. As in "Short Cuts," the cast is huge, but this ensemble is never put to the test. Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni are jokey and touching as long-parted paramours, but fine actors like Forest Whitaker and Lauren Bacall are wasted resources. A film that confines Tim Robbins and Julia Roberts to the bedroom is squandering its comic energies; when Roberts finally gets dressed, her smile—and her suit—remind you of what could have been.—A.L. (12/26/94-1/2/95) (Angelika Film Center, 19th Street East 6, Cinema I, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Safe Passage—A Marine in the Sinai sends his folks this message via videotape: "I'm already a hero—I grew up in the Singer family and lived to tell about it." After just a few minutes of this simultaneously banal and berserk domestic drama, the audience knows what he means. The story is set during a three-day period in which the clan awaits word of whether he was killed in a bombing. Mag Singer (Susan Sarandon) sees omens everywhere; her vaguely estranged husband (Sam Shepard) goes blind periodically; and each of their six other sons has an emotional complaint. The script desperately affirms family life—everyone pulls together and everything gets resolved. But viewers may experience the film as a cautionary plea for saner, more manageable households. Directed by Robert Allan Ackerman.—M.S. (19th Street East 6, Gotham Cinema, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Sarraounia—The Mauritanian writer-director Med Hondo's epic, about a late-nineteenth-century tribal queen (Ai Keïta) who defends her people during the French conquest of West Africa. With Jean-Roger Milo, Feodor Atkine, and Didier Sauvegrain. In French. (Thalia.)

Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight—A horror movie in which a Bible-wielding fiend (Billy Zane) terrorizes a group of boarding-house residents. With William Sadler and Jada Pinkett. Directed by Ernest Dickerson. (Manhattan Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, Olympia, and National Twin.)

Tom and Viv—The unhappy saga of T. S. Eliot's first marriage, transformed into a cautionary tale with a clear moral: stay away from poets. Willem Dafoe plays the young Eliot with a curious Boer accent and a look on his face that suggests he would be happier back in the jungles of "Platoon." As Vivienne, Eliot's distressed wife, Miranda Richardson gives such an overloaded performance that the simple drinking of a cup of tea becomes unwatchable. (If Vivienne really did behave like this, no wonder Eliot was in despair.) The movie regards the poet as a chilly repressive who locked away first his feelings and then—by extension—his wife. This view is, to put it mildly, open to argument, but the movie—sour, slow, and far more disdainful than the man it aims to expose—simply isn't good enough to sponsor useful debate. Brian Gilbert directs, heavily; the screenplay is by Michael Hastings (who wrote the original play) and Adrian Hodges. Those who think that poetry is a waste product of neurosis will have a lovely time.—A.L. (12/12/94) (Village East Cinemas.)

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000).
Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171).
Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th (477-6600).
Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th (982-0400).
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th (924-3363).
Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th (529-6799).
19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th (260-8000).
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th (689-6548).
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th (532-5544).
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th (683-0255).
Eastside Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 55th (755-3020).
Sutton I and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th (759-1411).
Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th (759-2262).
Plaza, 42 E. 58th (355-3320).
Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th (935-6420).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th (759-4630).
Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th (355-1663).
Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th (753-6022).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd (513-5408).
Gemini I and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th (832-1670).
Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th (737-2622).
New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th (744-7339).
68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th (734-0302).
Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st (879-1313).
East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th (249-5100).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th (534-1880).
Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th (876-2400).
86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th (249-1144).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110).
Waverly I and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd (929-8037).
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th (929-3350).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th (255-8800).
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd (513-5402).
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd (989-0060).
Guild, 33 W. 50th (757-2406).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th (765-7600).
57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th (581-7360).
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th (265-2520).
Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th (586-1900).
Paris, 4 W. 58th (980-5656).
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th (752-5959).
Columbus Circle, B'way at 61st (247-5070).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd (265-7466).
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd (757-2280).
Regency, B'way at 67th (724-3700).
Lincoln Square, B'way at 68th (336-5000).
84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th (877-3600).
Thalia, B'way at 95th (316-4962).
Metro Cinema I and 2, B'way at 99th (222-1200).
Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th (865-8128).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th (354-0900).
Embassy I, B'way at 46th (302-0494).
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th (730-7262).
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way (869-8340).
National Twin, B'way at 44th (869-0950).

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

Atlantic City (1981)—This spa that became a racketeers' paradise during Prohibition and in 1981 was on its chaotic way to becoming Vegas with a beach is an improbable place, and in this lyric farce, directed by Louis Malle, from John Guare's script, it gives a hallucinatory texture to the lives of the characters. The story is a prankish wish-fulfillment fantasy about prosperity—what it does to cities, what it can do for people. It takes Malle a little while to set up the crisscrossing of ten or twelve major characters, but once he does, the film operates by its own laws in its own world, and it has a lovely fizziness. Everything goes wrong and comes out right. The casting is superb. As an old numbers runner who dreams of the days when he was a flunky and bodyguard for big-time racketeers, Burt Lancaster gives what is probably his funniest (and finest) performance. Susan Sarandon plays an uneducated girl studying to become a croupier, and for once her googly-eyed, slightly stupefied look seems perfect.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 22.)

Beverly Hills Cop (1984)—The plot—Eddie Murphy is a Detroit cop who takes a vacation to go to Beverly Hills and hunt down the men who killed his best friend—is just a peg for little set pieces in which the street-smart Murphy, in his worn-out sweatshirts, saunters through swank Beverly Hills locations, tells whopping lies, and outsmarts the white dumbos. Yelling and fast-talking, and hotfooting the picture to keep it going, he rattles off pitifully undistinguished profanity, but we're cued to react to every stupid four-letter word as riotous. And, with Murphy busting his sides laughing in self-congratulation, and the camera jammed into his tonsils, damned if the audience doesn't whoop and carry on as if, yes, this is a wow of a comedy. There are a few likable, unforced funny scenes with Judge Reinhold as a credulous, velvet-voiced cop, Stephen Elliott as the police chief, and Bronson Pinchot as Serge. Directed by Martin Brest, from a lame script by Daniel Petrie, Jr.—P.K. (Whitney Museum; Jan. 20.)

Brute Force (1947)—The title is accurate: this is a crudely powerful prison picture, produced by Mark Hellinger, written by Richard Brooks, and directed by Jules Dassin. The essentially old-fashioned material was modernized by the use of sadistic scenes and such devices as having the power-mad warden (Hume Cronyn) suggest a homegrown Hitler. This is the kind of movie that is often called a man's picture; that is, fast, action-packed, pseudo-realistic. With Burt Lancaster, Charles Bickford, and Yvonne De Carlo.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 21 and 24.)

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill! (1965)—It opens with an "Outer Limits"-style warning about a new breed of killer females, then revels in their mayhem. The antiheroines (including Lori Williams and Haji) are bosomy go-go dancers and sports-car freaks, led by Tura Satana, a greedy man-hater with a mean karate chop. Soon they're hauling around a male stiff and a female hostage (Susan Bernard, *Playboy's* 1966 Miss December), and plotting to rip off a sexually demented desert miser (Stu Lancaster). A highlight of what Russ Meyer called his "drive-in period," this rabid Z movie stretches double-entendres into warped figure eights and offers some delicious bizarro strokes, such as an homage to the mentally impaired innocent from "Of Mice and Men" in the person of the miser's muscle-bound son, played by Dennis Busch.—M.S. (Film Forum 2.)

The Music Teacher (1988)—Arlene Croce once wrote that in ballets set to Mahler, "dancers toil up Angst Hill and down Weltschmerz

Dale. . . . Sexuality, if not repressed, is ambiguous; a Death Figure is bound to turn up somewhere." The plot of this Mahler-laden movie—about a retired vocal star (played by José van Dam) at the turn of the century, whose vitality ebbs as his students (Anne Roussel and Philippe Volter) come into their own—fits Croce's scenario to a T. At least the combination of autumnal imagery and Mahler's lyrical melancholy sets a mood. The movie works on the level of a lulling "environmental" CD, though not as the paean to mystical musical passion that the moviemakers intended. Co-starring Patrick Bauchau. Gérard Corbiau directed; five writers (including Corbiau) had a hand in the script. In French.—M.S. (Florence Gould Hall; Jan. 24.)

Night and the City (1950)—Several years before he made "Rififi," Jules Dassin directed this less flamboyant thriller, which is much less well known, but, in some ways, better. Dassin's shocking specialty—a kind of stifled violence that one fears will explode—finds the right milieu in the Gerald Kersh novel, a complex view of the underside of London entertainment. An Anglo-American cast is headed by Richard Widmark, who has possibly his best role as Harry Fabian, "the artist without an art," a tout with a creative passion for fantastic, shady schemes. The victims of his double-crossing artistry include Googie Withers, Francis L. Sullivan, Gene Tierney, Herbert Lom, and—as the old-time wrestler pitted against Mike Mazurki—Stanislaus Zbyszko.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 21.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)—"Barcelona" (Whit Stillman). . . . "The Specialist" (Luis Llosa). . . . "StarGate" (Roland Emmerich). . . . "The River Wild" (Curtis Hanson). . . . "Eat Drink Man Woman" (Ang Lee; in Mandarin). . . . "The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert" (Stephan Elliott).

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)—"Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!" (†).

Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-1717)—Through Jan. 19: "The Buddha of Suburbia" (Robert Michell). . . . ¶ From Jan. 20: Two films by Jean-Luc Godard.

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—Through Jan. 19: "Fast Trip, Long Drop" (Gregg Bordowitz) and "The Darker Side of Black" (Issac Julien). . . . ¶ From Jan. 20: "Latcho Drom" (Tony Gatlif, in Romany).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films starring Burt Lancaster. Jan. 19 at 2:30: "A Child Is Waiting" (1963, John Cassavetes). . . . Jan. 19 at 6: "The Killers" (1946, Robert Siodmak). . . . Jan. 21 at 5: "The Crimson Pirate" (1952, Siodmak). . . . Jan. 22 at 2: "Atlantic City" (†). . . . Jan. 22 at 5: "From Here to Eternity" (1953, Fred Zinnemann). . . . ¶ A program of films written and/or directed by Sidney Gilliat. Jan. 20 at 3: "The Green Man" (1956, Robert Day). . . . Jan. 20 at 6: "The Belles of St. Trinian's" (1954, Frank Launder). . . . Jan. 20 at 8: "The Rake's Progress" (1945). . . . Jan. 21 at 2:30: "The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan" (1952). . . . Jan. 24 at 2:30: "Waterloo Road" (1944). . . . Jan. 24 at 6: "Geordie" (1955, Launder). . . . ¶ A program of films directed by Jules Dassin. Jan. 20 at 2:30 and Jan. 22 at 2: "Thieves' Highway" (1949). . . . Jan. 20 at 7: "Rififi" (1956, in French). Mr. Dassin will be present. . . . Jan. 21 at 2 and Jan. 24 at 6: "Brute Force" (†). . . . Jan. 21 at 5: "Night and the City" (†). . . . Jan. 22 at 5: "The Naked City" (1948). . . . Jan. 23 at 2:30: "A Dream of Passion" (1978, in Greek and English). . . . Jan. 23 at 6: "He Who Must Die" (1958). . . . Jan. 24 at 2:30: "Topkapi" (1964).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. (875-5600)—"Beyond Perestroika: Jews and History in the Global Village." Jan. 18 at 2, Jan. 21 at 6:45, and Jan. 24 at 4:15: "Bye Bye America" (1993, Jan Schütte; in German). . . . Jan. 18 at 4:15 and Jan. 24 at 8:45: "Viva Castro" (1993, Boris Frumin; in Russian). . . . Jan. 18 at 6:30, Jan. 21 at 9, and Jan. 24 at 6:30: "Love" (1991, Valery Todorovsky; in Russian). . . . Jan. 18 at 8:45: "Just Beyond That Forest" (1991, Jan Lomnicki; in Polish). . . . Jan. 19 and Jan. 24 at 2: "Happy New Year, Moscow!" (1993, Natalya Piankova; in Russian). . . . Jan. 19 at 4:15 and Jan. 22 at 4:30: "Comrade Stalin's Trip to Africa" (1991, Irakli Kvirikadze; in Russian). . . . Jan. 19 at 6:30 and Jan. 22 at 8:30: "Russian Ragtime" (1993, Sergei Ursulyak; in Russian). . . . Jan. 19 at 8:45: "Balagan" (1993, Andres Veiel; in German). . . . Jan. 22 at 2: "The Light of Dying Stars" (1993, Charles Matton; in French). . . . Jan. 22 at 6:30: "Goodbye Boys" (1966, Michail Kalik; in Russian). . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 6: A program of films about the Second World War, made during and after the war. . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 2 and 4: "An American Tale" (1986, Don Bluth), an animated film.

Whitney Museum, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-0537)—A program of films and videos by, or about, black American males. Jan. 18 at noon: "The Boys in the Band" (1970, William Friedkin). . . . Jan. 18 at 3:30: "Can't Stop the Music" (1980, Nancy Walker). . . . Jan. 19 at 2: "Car Wash" (1976, Michael Schultz). . . . Jan. 19 at 5:30: "Norman . . . Is That You?" (1976, George Schlatter). . . . Jan. 20 at noon: "Beverly Hills Cop" (†). . . . Jan. 20 at 3:30: "Streamers" (1983, Robert Altman). . . . Jan. 21 at 11:30: "Noir et Blanc" (1989, Claire Devers; in French). . . . Jan. 21 at 2: "Robert Mapplethorpe" (1988, Nigel Finch) and three short films. . . . Jan. 21 at 4:30: "Tongues Untied" (1989, Marlon Riggs). . . . Jan. 22 at noon: Three short films. . . . Jan. 22 at 3:30: "Paris Is Burning" (1990, Jennie Livingston).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Jan. 22 at 7, the feature will be "Swamp Woman" (1956, Roger Corman), with Michael Connors, Marie Windsor, Beverly Garland, and Carole Matthews.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 24 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "The Music Teacher" (†).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Jan. 20 at 8: A program of films by Sidney Meyers, Frank Simon, and Ruth Stephan. . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 4: A program of films by Yasunori Yamamoto. . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 7: Seven early films by Rudy Burckhardt. . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 5: Recent short avant-garde films from Germany. . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 7: Five recent short films by Burckhardt.

GARY LEIB

PROJECTIONS

Cause for Celebration

Not since the quincentenary of Columbus's voyage has a commemoration threatened to spark as much discussion as this year's celebration of the movies' hundredth birthday. On Monday, January 23, "American Cinema: One Hundred Years of Filmmaking" begins a weekly airing of the issues, on PBS. In the series' companion volume, the film historian Jeanine Basinger laments that the gestation of motion-picture technology was so complicated and so diffuse "that scholars and archivists have had to conduct many discussions in order to agree upon the 'date of birth.'" Experts have settled on 1895, because that was the year the Lumière brothers projected the first moving images before a paying public, at the Grand Café in Paris. As the epic of an epoch, "American Cinema" covers such matters tolerably well. Its ten parts—"Romantic Comedy," "The Star," "The Edge of Hollywood," and so forth—feature some offbeat archival footage (like Bette Davis mocking an interviewer). But must movie histories always rely so heavily on "Casablanca"?

In Europe, where the anniversary chatter has been building for months, nothing has topped the squabble that ensued when the Italian government excluded Pier Paolo Pasolini from a centennial celebration that honored just about every other exportable director in the country's history. Apparently the controversies surrounding the director's brazen work, his homosexuality, and his sordid 1975 murder remain very much alive. (An upcoming feature film, "Pasolini: An Italian Crime," promises to keep a spotlight on his death.) Meanwhile, obscenity charges were recently brought against a video-rental shop in Cincinnati for offering Pasolini's late movie, "Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom." (They were dropped on a technicality.) Amid all the palaver, it's a relief to report that the director's "Mamma Roma" (1962), the story of a streetwalker (Anna Magnani) and her delinquent son (Ettore Garofolo), will receive its American theatrical première this week, at Film Forum. Magnani's Earth Mother trademarks—the husky voice, the raucous sudden laugh—are here in high fidelity. Her most emotionally expressive moment, though, comes in a blank-faced closeup, as she watches her son practicing the tango.

—Brendan Lemon

GUESS
JEANS

ART DIR: PAUL MARCIANO PH: DEWEY NICKS GUESS©1995

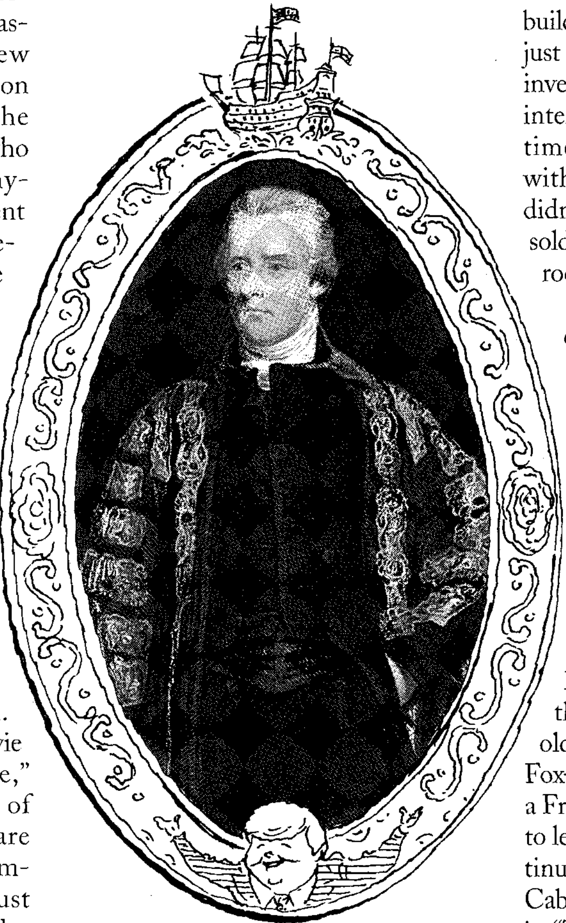
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

MAN OF THE MOMENT PITT THE YOUNGER: NEWT'S NEW HERO?

THE other day, at a Washington gathering of deep thinkers (Alvin Toffler, Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington), the new Speaker revealed his special affection for the British politician Pitt the Younger (meaning William Pitt, who was younger than his dad, anyway), who led the British Parliament through part of the Napoleonic period. Newt explained that Pitt the Younger, "surrounded by the disciples" of Adam Smith, "rationalized British tax policy to create the commercial environment in which so much wealth is made that people were able to fight the Napoleonic Wars." There is the material of the conservative dream, new- or, anyway, Newt-style: the think tanks pitch in (all those disciples); the tax code is reformed; the final triumph against the dastardly foreigner is achieved.

Pitt *is* an interesting politician. With his appearance in the new movie "The Madness of King George," we may even be in for a period of Pitt-chic, Pittomania. So here are some facts about him. He is remembered as Pitt the Younger not just because there was a Pitt the Elder around but, more important, because he really was young—just twenty-four when he first became Prime Minister of England. That happened less because he charged to the front than because politics in those days was restricted to a handful of peers and near-peers, like a game of musical chairs carried on by Rockefellers and Mellons—the oligarchic-opportunity society, one might call it. Pitt was courtly, intelligent, hard to shake from an idea; he was also, among other things, a drunk, a debtor who never got his enormous bills paid, and probably gay. Once, a group of merchants from the City offered him a hundred thousand pounds to pay off his debts. Pitt wouldn't have it, because he thought that taking large sums of money from rich businessmen would make him look dishonest. "There are no public philanthropists in the City," he said. (Apparently, he hadn't met Rupert Murdoch.)



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE; ENGRAVING: ARCHIVE PHOTOS

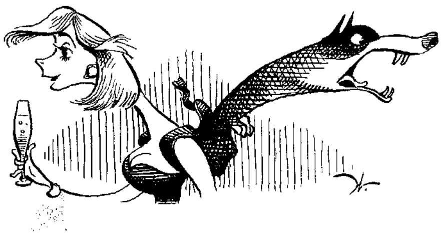
PITT accomplished two good things: one was to keep Napoleon out of Great Britain, which he did mostly by building up the Navy. To do so, he didn't just reform the tax code—he more or less invented the income tax, in the national interest. He also stuck by Nelson at a time when, Nelson having taken up with Lady Hamilton, a lot of people didn't. Pitt seemed to think that what soldiers and sailors did in their own bedrooms was nobody's goddam business.

Pitt did a lot of lousy things, including union-bashing almost before there were unions to bash. But when he had to he put pragmatism before loony Tory beliefs (and there were a lot of those around then, too). Eventually, he tried to (as we would say now) broaden the base of his government. He pushed King George, who was even worse when he was lucid than when he was crazy, to emancipate Roman Catholics (which would have helped solve the Irish question), and to allow his old enemy the liberal reformer Charles Fox—who knew that the best way to start a French-style revolution in England was to let the majority of the population continue to feel disenfranchised—into the Cabinet. (By the way, Fox gets a bum rap in "The Madness.") King George, however, had his hard head and his harder heart set against allowing anyone into the government who thought that the French people, in overthrowing Louis, might have had a point. Pitt was no reformer—he was a hard-liner, in fact—but he did see that the way to keep unhappy people from feeling even unhappier was not to pretend that they didn't exist.

BACKPACK TO THE FUTURE

If your clock is set on Fashion Standard Time, you know that backpacks-as-purses happened a year ago, which means that they should be long gone by now. But they're not. This is because backpacks are great tools: they're roomy and accommodating and you can carry all your stuff in them, plus gesticulate during conversations and eat a pretzel. But that's also the worst thing about them, because wearing a backpack requires you to turn your back on your possessions, which allows someone behind you to open your pack and remove your liquid assets before you've felt even a nudge.

So while last year's backpacks-as-purses were all about fabric and cuteness and tomboy chicness, this year's are all about staying shut. Last year, most packs closed with a drawstring. Now a drawstring is considered necessary but hardly sufficient. This year, backpacks have a drawstring top that tightens with toggles, a big flap to cover the top, and a turn lock to hold the flap down (Coach); a drawstring top with a huge flap fastened down by a gigantic gold swivel-eye snap hook, and a secret side entrance via a zipper (Nine West); a drawstring top-flap lock-and-key combo (Calvin Klein); a top-flap double-D-ring hitch (Prada); a top-flap zip-clip with Velcro tongue (Barganza); a drawstring top covered by a zippered sheath and an industrial-size metal hook and eye (Freedom Bag); and a daunting top-flap buckle-snap arrangement with—thank goodness—a secret zippered entrance through the back (Kenneth Cole). So far, no one is using double-acting spring hinges, screw-pin anchor shackles, heavy-duty safety hasps, or attack-trained Doberman pinschers, although every backpack made by Kipling—drawstring top with a big flap and a Velcro tab—comes with a slightly scary plush toy gorilla attached by a chain to the front of the pack.



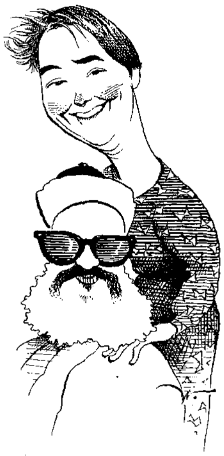
THE WOMAN BEHIND THE SHEIKH

In court a few weeks ago, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman was talking about lamb. The blind Egyptian cleric, who is facing charges of "seditious conspiracy" in connection with an alleged plot to blow up New York City landmarks, wanted to make sure that the meat he had been eating in prison was *halal*—suitable for consumption by Muslims. The hearing was one of the first duties of the Sheikh's defense attorney, Lynne Stewart, a plump little woman with a cherubic face, a raspy voice, and an engaging smile. Stewart politely pressed for and received an assurance from the judge that the meat was up to standard. Then, when the hearing was adjourned, she gave her client a friendly pat on the back and, zoom, she was off, back to her office and a great deal of work.

Stewart, a radical in the old, fight-the-status-quo sense of the word, had just over a month to prepare for the Sheikh's trial, which began in Manhattan Federal Court last week. She divided that time between the Sheikh's ninth-floor cell, in the Metropolitan Correctional Center's maximum-security wing, and her office, a creaky, ramshackle former stable at the end of Charles Street, near the Hudson River. There is graffiti, in red crayon, beside the door ("VIVA SOCIALISMO ♥CUBA LIBRE♥"), and the window behind her desk opens onto a huge mural depicting a pantheon of revolutionaries (Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Malcolm X).

Sitting at her desk, in a purple sweater and a green madras skirt, Stewart looks more like a schoolteacher than like an attorney, which is no coincidence. In the late nineteen-sixties, she worked as a librarian at a public school in Harlem, but she found that it was difficult to rabble-rouse from that position. So, in 1971, after her third child was born, she quit, telling her husband, "I'm an eccentric. If I stay in the schools, I'll be a shopping-bag lady." At thirty-one, Stewart headed to Rutgers School of Law in Newark, and soon after graduating opened her own law practice, in the Charles Street building, above her husband's motorcycle shop. At first, Stewart's business consisted mainly of divorce cases, but, she explained, "I always liked the idea of criminal law, because I could indulge my anti-authoritarian instincts."

Those instincts led her, in the nineteen-eighties, to become involved in controversial cases like the 1981 Brinks holdup by members of the Weather Underground, and she teamed up with the activist attorney William Kunstler on a series of cases involving political radicals, such as the Ohio Seven. In 1988, Kunstler and Stewart represented Larry Davis, a black man accused of shooting six New York City police officers. Davis was acquitted of the most serious charges, but the trial marked the end of Stewart's collaboration with Kunstler. "We had conflicts, particularly about the press and politics," Stewart said. "We sort of parted company, but we're not on bad terms."



Things had been fairly quiet for Stewart when, in early November, she received a call from former Attorney General Ramsey Clark. Sheikh Rahman planned to defend himself, and his followers, concerned about the wisdom of that strategy, had asked Clark for help. He turned to Stewart, but she was reluctant to take the case, for fear of jeopardizing her private practice. She recounted that Clark told her, " 'If the building's burning and the baby's on the third floor, you don't always have time to go out and get your asbestos coat and your heavy rubber boots. It's up to you.' " Before agreeing to take the case, though, she visited the Sheikh in his cell. "We hit it off almost immediately," she recalled, surmising that though the Sheikh could not see her, he was "very sensitive to the vibes."

Last week, with jury selection well under way, Stewart's preparation reached a fever pitch. It's hard to mention the Sheikh without provoking a snappy rebuke of the government's case. "They're saying that because he preached in a militant manner and people took him up on it, it's the equivalent of shouting 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre," Stewart protested. Turning around to face the mural outside, she invoked one of its vigilant revolutionaries. "Malcolm X said, 'By any means necessary.' And now they're making movies about him."

RUDI'S ENCORE

DESPITE the promo circus, despite the balletomanes hungry for worn slippers, the disposal, late last week at Christie's, of Rudolf Nureyev's belongings had an old-fashioned feel. Cozy, almost. Partly, this was because the auction house hadn't culled the offerings too ruthlessly, so that along with the big-ticket stuff there were plenty of things—kitschy picture frames, shelves of worn books—still tremulous with domestic life.

"Those kilims are beautiful," Monique van Vooren, an actress and a close friend of the late dancer, said. "But you never saw them. He kept them rolled up under the bed."

Iris Love, a formidable Manhattan society figure when not on archeological digs, was asked what she thought of the affair. "It's rather up and down," she said.

"Nureyev? Or his things?" somebody asked, baffled.

Iris Love had known Nureyev, too, and had been to parties and dinners at his apartment in the Dakota. If the Christie's get-together did have a cozy air, it was largely because of the number of people present whom the dancer had counted among his friends, and who were taking a last look at his chattel.

"I really should bid on that," a man said, contemplating Lot 303, a bed. A tag identified it as an "Empire ormolu-mounted *lit d'alcove*. Early 19th Century." It was big. The man was well dressed but quite young.

"You must have a large apartment," somebody told him, impressed.

"For sentimental reasons," the young man murmured.

"For how many sentimental reasons?"

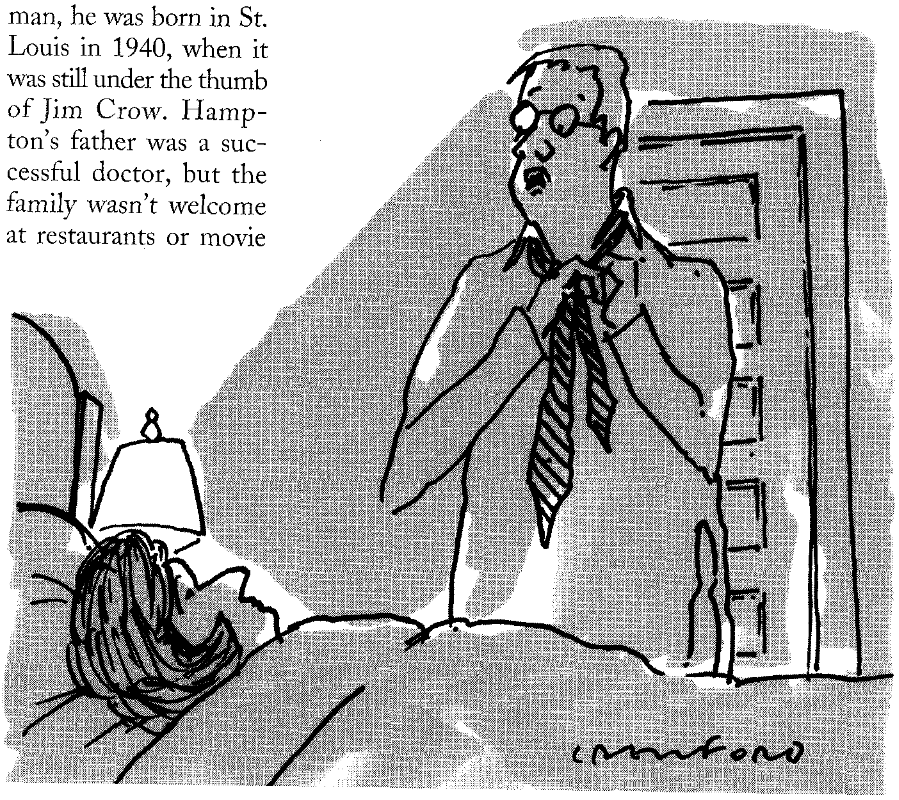
The young man paused, in thought. "Not enough to make it worth bidding on," he admitted. He smiled, and drifted off.

EYES ON HENRY HAMPTON

HENRY HAMPTON is the kind of shameless idealist who dares to say, "In doing this series, I intend to appeal to the better side." The series in question, "America's War on Poverty," which Hampton and his production company, Blackside, created and produced, is a five-part documentary airing this week on PBS. Thanks to "Eyes on the Prize," an extravagantly admired pair of documentary series on the civil-rights movement, which he produced in 1987 and 1990, Hampton is now a star, at least by the modest standards of public television. He was camped out the other day in a suite in the upper-bohemian Mayflower Hotel, on Central Park West. A few days earlier, he said, he had had a breakfast meeting with Norman Lear to seek advice about a pilot for an hour-long dramatic series he wants to do. Hampton plans to appeal to the better side of commercial television—to "get people talking about substantive issues rather than one more crime story," he says, in his gravelly and exceedingly soft voice.

Life has done its best to foster some resentment in Hampton but, apparently, without success. A black man, he was born in St. Louis in 1940, when it was still under the thumb of Jim Crow. Hampton's father was a successful doctor, but the family wasn't welcome at restaurants or movie theatres in the white part of town. When he was fifteen, he was stricken with polio. "It was the year of the great epidemic," says Hampton, a broad-shouldered man with a big, bearded face. As he talks, his right leg jiggles; his left leg, held in a brace, is motionless. "The vaccines arrived in my father's office the same month that I got it." Hampton was confined to a wheelchair for three years. What he recalls from that time, though, is the friends at his virtually all-white parochial school who carried him up the steps to physics lab, and the red Thunderbird his father bought him.

WHEN the civil-rights struggle came along, Hampton says, he signed up. When he and some college friends decided to wear down a segregated restaurant in St. Louis, Hampton played the good guy in jacket and tie who would gently reason with the owner. When that failed, he says, "we'd send in the shock troops." Hampton moved to Boston, edited publications for the Unitarian Church, and became more deeply involved in both the civil-rights and antiwar movements. In 1968, he founded Blackside, and, after many modest documentaries and years of



"Believe me, Alice, you didn't miss a thing. It wasn't even a party—it was a positioning event."

fund-raising in the wilderness, he was able to make the epic “Eyes on the Prize.”

The civil-rights movement was a glorious moral crusade; even Newt Gingrich implied as much a couple of weeks ago. Hampton views the War on Poverty in comparable terms. Its successes, he argues, have been forgotten, and its failures grossly magnified. The real problem, he feels, is that the nation’s leaders have lost the “internal passion” that motivated President Johnson. Johnson’s memory is not so dear to millions of Americans, and Hampton recognizes that “America’s War on Poverty” is likely to be far more controversial than “Eyes.”

Life, meanwhile, keeps returning, with its petty distractions. Hampton is in remission from lung cancer, which was discovered in 1991, and he has finally recovered from the radiation, the chemotherapy, and the bone-marrow transplant that followed. *And* he is experiencing the long-term effects of his polio, which may lead to increasing weakness in his good leg. He’s had to give up both golf and flying, which he refers to as his “two churches.” But Hampton does not seem especially fazed. He is looking for a stronger brace for his golf game, he says, and is planning to fly cross-country with a friend as soon as the F.A.A. will let him.

TWYLA THARP LOOKS AHEAD AND THINKS BACK

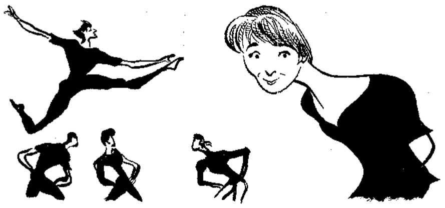
TWYLA THARP is working these days without a company of her own and, until tax structures change, without a permanent base of support. When she gives a performance, as she is now doing at the Brooklyn Academy, the stage is bare, the dancers wear practice clothes and dance to taped music, and the ticket prices are scaled down. A “poverty” format becomes Twyla Tharp as it does few choreographers. But the economic picture that dancers face today is not pretty. At lunch in a downtown coffee shop recently, Tharp refused to discuss it. “Everybody knows how bad it is and how bad it’s going to get. It’s boring. I’ll have the chicken soup, please. And, by the way, when was it ever good?”

Certainly things have been worse for Twyla Tharp. So far, only a half-dozen choreographers have been given MacArthur fellowships; she is one of them. The main benefit it has conferred on her, she says, is “unstructured time.” “It means I can practically live in the studio,” she explained. “If I call a rehearsal for 1 P.M. and I’m not ready to begin until one-fourteen, I don’t feel guilty about those lost fourteen minutes. I’m grateful for the money, but I don’t feel I’m entitled to it. I’m entitled to nothing but a second chance if I fail. That’s all anyone’s entitled to, I think.”

To get a second chance, you have to have taken a first one. Every new dance begins with the choreographer assembling the dancers and saying to them, in effect, “Take a chance with me.” The first step in the collaboration is always a leap of faith—for the choreographer as much as for the dancers. Tharp insists that she does not necessarily know where she is going when she starts a piece. “I have a desire to do it, and that gets me through. A whole lot of things get decided in the making. At some point in the piece, I begin to feel which movements belong and which don’t. But the luxury of using up rehearsal time deciding how to proceed isn’t given to me with every commission. In commercial work, I’m hired to get results, and I rehearse differently: I enact an effect that has been prescribed by the conditions of the contract. It isn’t art. Art is about finding things out.”

Tharp stopped in the middle of her chicken soup. “You know,” she said, “I think sometimes my very first dancers were inhumanly perfect and my first years as a choreographer were ideal because of them. And that’s true. But last summer, in Washington, I had the kind of dancers you have to have if you’re going to get at the primary truth of how something is made. I made a full evening’s work on seven dancers. Sheldon”—Sheldon Schwartz, of the Kennedy Center, which had provided free rehearsal space and time—“managed to find some money to cover their expenses. We performed our evening in the Terrace Theatre, and Hillary and Chelsea Clinton came. Mrs. Yeltsin came. But we didn’t know any of that would happen when we began. I started off with nothing on the back burner. Then I began listening to some Bartók and some Gluck and Duke Ellington. Because I was in Washington, I paid attention to world events, for a change. I don’t focus on an issue—I focus on an antidote. There was Rwanda every night on television, and every day in the studio I would be listening to Burundi drumming. I went to see the Civil War battlefields, and from that I gained a sense of geography and a sense of strategy, so that I suddenly knew how to end the evening, with ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic.’ ”

THE performance that Tharp is giving for the next two weeks at BAM, “Red, White & Blues: New Works,” is a replica of the Kennedy Center concert, with the same performers. Tharp herself will dance and also talk, and she will probably use a mike, although she would prefer not to. The whole look and feel of the evening are to be as close to unenhanced reality as possible. Those who remember Tharp’s beginnings may find themselves transported back to the church halls and school gyms where she and her dancers originally performed, almost exactly thirty years ago. For Tharp personally, the evening is a commemoration—her word—of a summer spent working in the nation’s capital, unfunded but productive, pleasurable, and not without perks, which she mentions with glee. “We got free haircuts. Free restaurant food. An usher there baked us banana bread. It was a lot like the old days.” ♦



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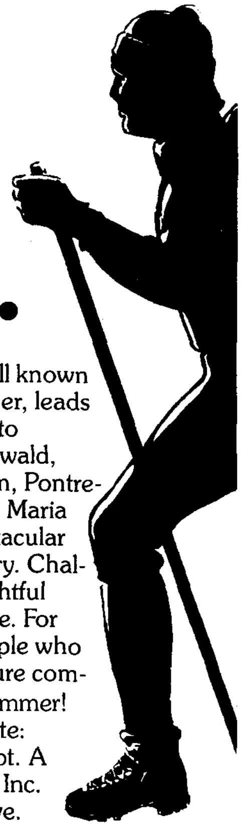
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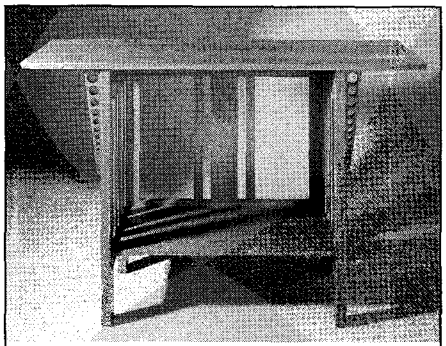
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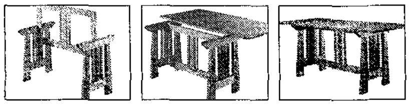
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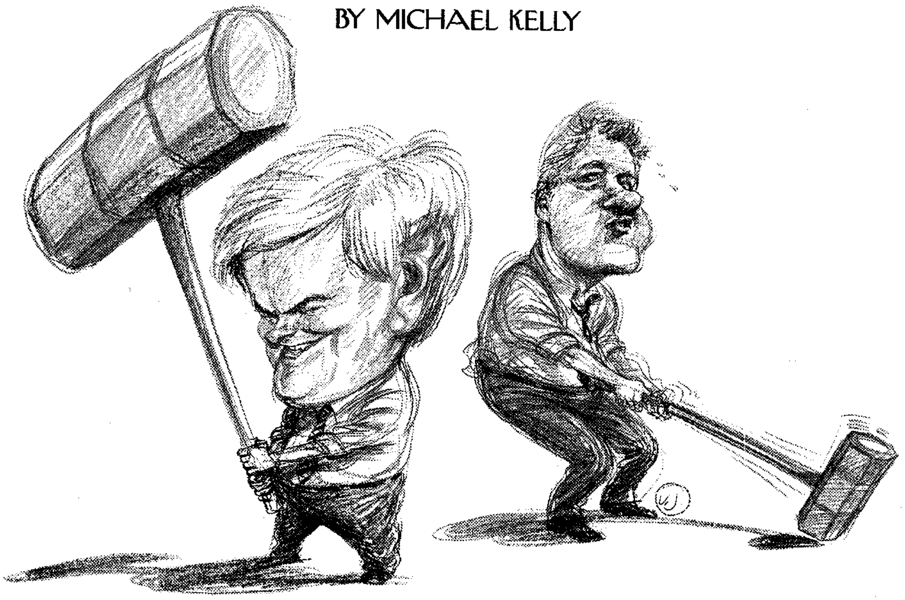
LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

RIP IT UP

The race is on between Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton to see who can dismember government faster.

BY MICHAEL KELLY



While the Speaker has been passionately pondering his vision of the world for two decades, the President is formulating his philosophy on the redefinitional fly.

VICTOR JUHASZ

It's beginning to look as if the midterm elections of 1994 might have ushered in something bigger than a mere Republican majority. An effort is under way, vast in ambition and experimental in nature, to radically alter the shape of government itself. The model of modern governance—which first took form with the Progressive movement of the early twentieth century, reached full bloom under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, and began approaching its current condition of giantism under Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon—has always rested on one overarching idea. The idea was that, for the sake of America's social, economic, and moral well-being, the country must be led by a wise, powerful central authority, an activist federal government that would serve as a combination national social engineer and national policeman. The government does for the citizens, towns, cities, and states what they are too weak, poor, benighted, or corrupt to do for themselves. For more than half a century, this view of government has informed the actions of Congress and of Presidents, and it has been the core of the Democratic Party's philosophy.

The new Republican Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, wants to destroy this model and transfer a good deal of the accrued power of the State to the states. This idea, which is emerging as the great political impulse of the nineteen-nineties, goes by several misleadingly mild and boring names—devolution, federalism, "subsidiarity." It is, to use an overworked word correctly, revolutionary. Devolution argues that the central authority has improperly arrogated too much power to itself, and has become at once abusive of the rights of citizens and irresponsive to their needs. The solution, the theory goes, is to strip away from the government many of its functions and to assign those functions to smaller units of polity—to the states, cities, and towns, and ultimately to the citizens themselves. Implicitly but absolutely, devolution rejects both liberalism and the modern model of government.

It is not terribly surprising that a conservative Republican Speaker should want devolution. It is a little surprising to discover how utterly the idea dominates Gingrich's actions, and why. It is very surprising to discover that the Democratic President Bill Clinton has come to tentatively embrace Gingrich's view, and is now urgently competing against him in what amounts to a governmental disarmament race. It is not surprising at all to learn that while Gingrich's views are based on a complex and grand—not to mention grandiose—vision of the world which he has been passionately pondering for two decades, Clinton is formulating his philosophy on the re-re-redefinitional fly.

The result of Gingrich's utopianism and Clinton's impressionism is one of the more remarkable competitions in Washington's history, as the two government careerists race to see who can dismantle government faster. On Capitol Hill, Gingrich guides the most disciplined House of Representatives in decades in a script that calls for Congress to give away in a hundred days many of its most vital powers. At the White House, in what one official describes as "the top-priority effort of the Administration," a desperate game of catchup is afoot. In the past month, White House aides have been busy telephoning experts on privatization and devolution in what one expert calls a "scramble" for ideas. Two weeks ago, Vice-President Al Gore sent a memorandum to all departments and agencies in the government asking them to justify every program and function they perform. Those programs that cannot prove themselves are to be terminated, sold, or passed on to the state or local governments.

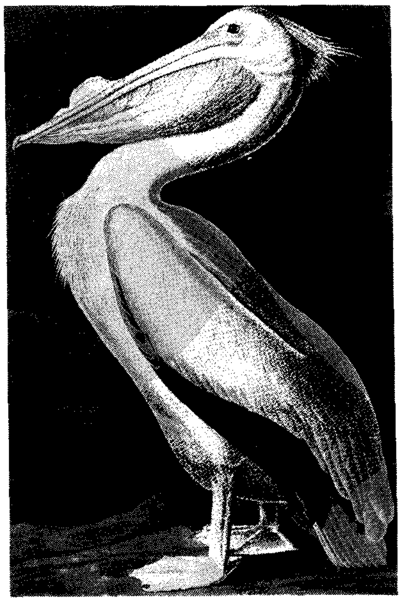
A GOOD way to begin understanding the momentousness of what is going on here is to focus on what drives Newt Gingrich, because it is he, not Clinton, who is clearly leading the charge. America's new political leader is not, as is widely believed, a conservative who happens to have some quirky radical notions. He is a quirky radical who happens to have some conservative notions. The truth of this was apparent here last Tuesday in the Grand Ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel, where the new Speaker held forth for nearly fifty rather mind-numbing minutes to three hundred and seventy-five fellow-believers in the faith that ours is a dying civilization.

Gingrich's speech, the closing address in the daylong seminar on "Democracy in Virtual America," carried the vaguely lofty and vaguely incomprehensible title "From Virtuality to Reality." It carried on in that vein. "If you think about the notion that the great challenge of our lifetime is first to imagine a future that is worth spending our lives getting to, and then, because of the technologies and the capabilities we have today, to get it up to sort of a virtual state, although that's done in terms of actual levels of sophistication, all that's done in your mind," he started out, in a sentence that did not quite manage to end, or make sense. "Most studies of leadership argue that leaders actually are acting out past decisions. The problem when you get certainty with great leaders is that they have already thoroughly envisioned the achievement, and now it's just a matter of implementation. And so it's very different. And so in a sense, virtuality at the mental level is something I think you find in most leadership over historical periods.

"But in addition, the thing I want to talk about today and that I find fascinating is that we are not in a new place; it is just becoming harder and harder and harder to avoid the place where we are."

It would be easy enough to dismiss this blather as, well, blather. But beneath the tangled verbiage was a profound point. Most of the audience seemed to grasp it right away; they had the advantage of speaking the same language. They were Tofflerians. Gingrich, too, is a Tofflerian. Indeed, to identify him with the teachings of the futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler is far more important to comprehending what he is trying to do with his newfound power than to identify him with the Republican Party. Republicanism is merely Gingrich's politics; Tofflerianism is his religion.

In 1970, the then obscure writer Alvin Toffler published a best-selling polemic entitled "Future Shock." In this and later books ("Powershift," "War and Anti-War in the Twenty-First Century," "The Third Wave," and, most recently, a monograph titled "Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave") Toffler and his co-author wife advance the theory that Western civilization is doomed and dying, and is being subsumed by a new civilization. The Tofflers, who like to describe the changeover from one civilization to another in oceanic metaphors, see the incoming civilization as the third great "wave" of human history. In the First Wave, they say, agrarian civilization replaced the civilization of the hunter-



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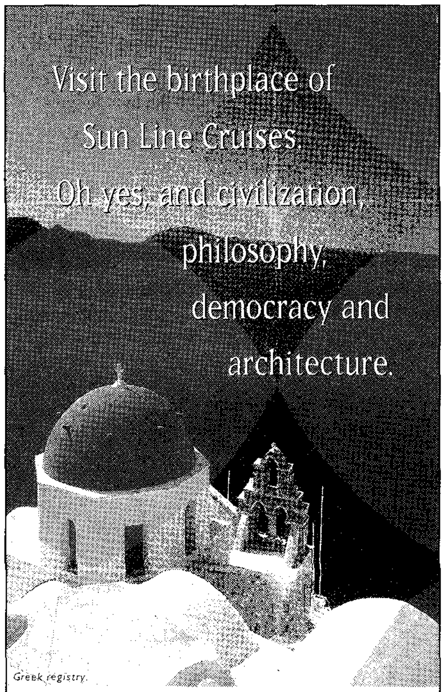

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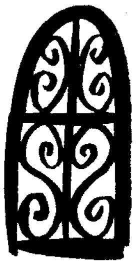
gatherers. In the Second Wave, beginning some three hundred years ago, industrial civilization replaced the agrarian age. During the last few decades, the Tofflerian theory holds, Western civilization has been in the midst of a transformation from Second Wave to Third Wave society, as the Age of Information advances on the waning Industrial Age.

This is serious, even apocalyptic, business, the Tofflers suggest. "A new civilization is emerging in our lives, and blind men everywhere are trying to suppress it," they write in "Creating a New Civilization." "This new civilization brings with it new family styles; changed ways of working, loving, and living; a new economy; new political conflicts; and beyond all this an altered consciousness as well.



"Humanity faces a quantum leap forward. It faces the deepest social upheaval and creative restructuring of all time. Without clearly recognizing it, we are engaged in building a remarkable new civilization from the ground up."

The problem with the birth of a new civilization, according to the Tofflers, is the natural tendency of the old civilization to refuse to die. Recalcitrant First Wavers (for example, landed gentry, pastoral poets, Luddites) resisted the Second Wave, and now a similarly entrenched Old Guard (for example, politicians, unionists, cyberphobes, journalists) is fighting against the Third. This, the Tofflers warn, is a big mistake, because "industrial civilization is coming to an end." Those nations (and individuals) who don't get in the swim of the Third Wave are going to drown in the "crosscurrent."

What is coming, the Tofflers say, is a new order, in which politics, reflecting the characteristics of an Information Age, will be defined by a disuniting of society—by, to cop the jargon of the faith, decentralization, demassification, and desynchronization. For this new political order, the Tofflers offer three concrete suggestions, all of which are devolutionary, and radical. The first idea is to replace the "increasingly obsolete" principle of majoritarian rule ("no longer adequate as a legitimating principle") with "a minority-based twenty-first-century democracy." The second idea is to replace representative democracy ("pseudorepresentative," the Tofflers sneer) with "semi-direct democracy," national plebiscites conducted along the information highway. The third idea, "decision division," is explicitly devolutionary. "It is not possible for a society to de-massify economic activity, communications and many other crucial processes without also, sooner or later, being compelled to decentralize government decision-making as well," the Tofflers explain. "There is no possibility of restoring sense, order and management 'efficiency' to many governments without a substantial devolution of central power."

Gingrich, who has been tirelessly discussing all this with his friends the Tofflers for two decades, may not buy it all, but he buys the basics. "Alvin and Heidi Toffler have given us the key to viewing the current disarray within the positive framework of a dynamic, exciting future," Gingrich writes in the foreword to "Creating a New Civilization," which was published in 1994. "For twenty years, we have worked together to try to develop a future-conscious politics and popular understanding which would make it easier for America to make the transition between the Second Wave civilization which is clearly dying and the emerging but still in many ways undefined and not yet understood Third Wave civilization towards which we must move."

In his speech last week, Gingrich—with the Tofflers on the dais listening appreciatively—declared that his primary goal is to help society "make the transition into the Third Wave Information Age that Alvin and Heidi Toffler describe," and argued the case for devolution as an integral part of that effort. "My ideal of America is, I think you still have a very powerful, very effective central government," Gingrich said. "It's powerful in foreign policy, it's powerful in keeping the dollar stable, it's powerful in stopping all drugs from coming into the country, it's powerful in doing those things we give to the central government. And then it says, you know, frankly: 'You've got a lot of things to do back home. Don't even call me. I don't want to know. There's no reason I have to pay attention.' "

In this ideal America, Gingrich imagines power ultimately devolving down to the fundamental particles of American society—"the citizens"—who would, in keeping with the Tofflerian notion of semi-direct democracy, be empowered

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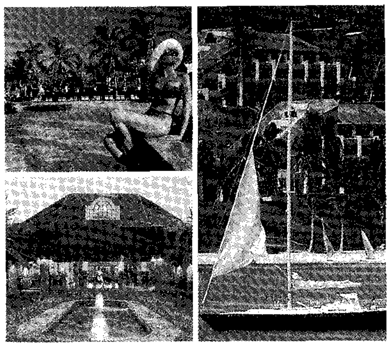
SINCE the midterm election, Gingrich has become a much-studied man. The study has been a confusing one at times, largely because of the contradictions within the man himself. Most of what Gingrich says and does fits neatly into the conservative mold, but the Speaker can also sound surprisingly liberal. A case in point is Gingrich's recent McGovernnik suggestion (which he later called a "dumb idea") that the government give poor Americans tax credits to buy laptop computers (see Comment, page 6). Gingrich may be a political populist, but he is also an intellectual élitist. (He cannot go five minutes without assigning reading lists to fellow-congressmen, reporters, and anyone else within earshot, and the look of barely restrained contempt that crosses his face when somebody says something he considers especially stupid is the best show in town since John Sununu lost his real job and had to learn to pretend to like human beings.) But the disparate parts of Gingrich coalesce into a coherent whole when seen from the perspective of his overriding identity. In deed and in word, Gingrich is animated by the dream of devolution. In the context of Tofflerian apocalyptic politics, the suggestion of tax credits for laptops makes perfect sense—not as a conservative idea but as a quintessentially Third Wave one.

Consider also the congressional-reform measures that the Speaker rolled effortlessly through the House in the 104th Congress's extraordinary fourteen-hour opening day. There were eight rule changes—cutting congressional committee staffs, reducing the number of committees and subcommittees, imposing a six-year term limit on committee chairs and an eight-year term limit on the Speaker, requiring a three-fifths supermajority for any income-tax rate increases, banning the practice of voting by proxy, reforming budgetary accounting procedures so that appropriations are counted against a baseline of zero rather than compared with projected spending, making public all hearings but those exempted by special committee vote, ordering an outside audit of Congress—and a bill requiring that the laws passed by Congress apply to Congress. All were designed to limit the power of Congress to act as the guiding force of a powerful central government.

None of the measures is in itself a spectacular blow to Washington power, but cumulatively they represent a great weakening. A Congress that must apply its own laws to itself is less likely to pass legislation, for example, micromanaging behavior in the workplace. A Congress that needs a supermajority to raise income taxes is less likely to do so; fewer tax increases from Congress means less power for Congress. Term limits on committee chairmen mean that ambitious senior congressmen will find it much more difficult to build their committees into powerful regulatory weapons, as the Michigan Democrat John D. Dingell did with the Energy and Commerce Committee. Cutting committee staffs would decimate the ranks of Congress's bureaucratic troops. The change from "baseline" to "zero-based" budgeting means that Congress will no longer be able to define an increase in appropriations for a given program as a spending cut; that will put pressure on Congress to spend less, and the less Congress can spend the less it can do. Banning proxy voting means that congressmen will be forced to spend more time on the mechanics of their jobs and less on enlarging their personal bases of power and influence.

These measures are, moreover, only the first steps. Many of the other legislative goals that the Gingrich-led Republicans have for the 104th Congress should be seen (as Gingrich himself clearly sees them) not as discrete, programmatic measures but as pieces of a larger campaign to hollow out the federal authority. One obvious example is the proposed constitutional amendment to limit the number of terms a member of Congress can serve. Another, of potentially even greater impact, is the so-called unfunded-mandates bill. This measure, which is expected to pass a House upon which Gingrich exerts iron control, strikes at the very core of federal regulatory authority. If Congress no longer has the power to pass laws that mandate state compliance with new regulations (unless Congress is willing to pay the costs of that compliance), central government loses a large portion of its reason for being.

In the most important legislative matter the 104th Congress is likely to consider—welfare reform—Gingrich is in-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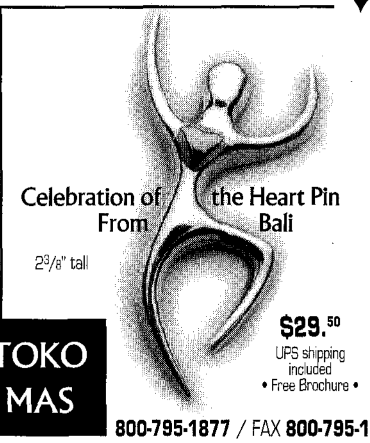
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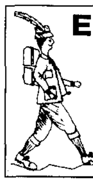
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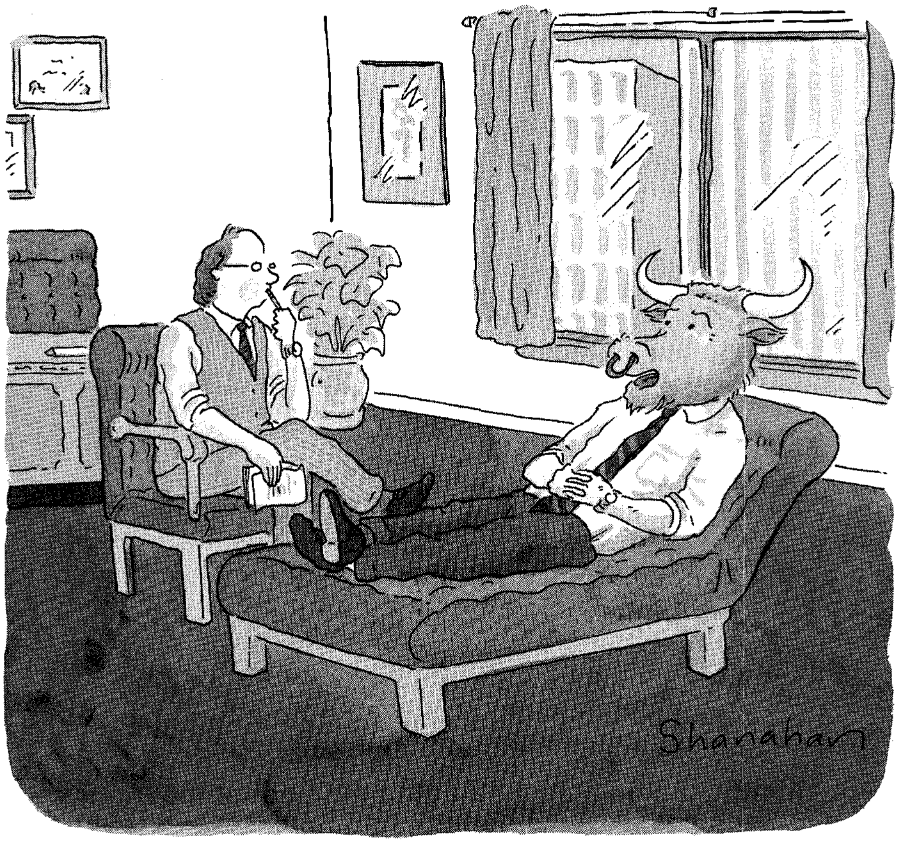
creasingly taking the devolutionary approach. The bill that is expected to emerge from the G.O.P. would essentially consolidate funds from separate welfare programs into block grants to the states, with far fewer federal guidelines. Ten days ago, after a delegation of Republican governors meeting with Republican leaders and members of Congress objected to the level of micromanagement in the Contract with America's welfare plan, the Speaker backed off, suggesting that the states be given more latitude to decide for themselves. "Gingrich appears to be getting more laissez-faire on this," said Mark Liedl, an aide to Wisconsin Governor Tommy G. Thompson, who attended the meeting. "There are a lot of conservatives who don't like this, and that battle must be fought, and it will be fought in short order, but there is no question that the basic structure of any welfare bill is going to be devolutionary. There will be block grants and they will not be prescriptive; there will be reams of regulations and mandates gone."

In pursuit of Tofflerian devolution, Gingrich is also using his administrative powers as Speaker. It is axiomatic in the Third Wave world view that, in the Age of Information, information is the currency of power: whereas limiting information solidifies the power of those who control it, expanding information destroys that control. With this in mind, Gingrich, in the 104th's first week, launched Congress deep into cyberspace through a Library of Congress online system called Thomas. In Thomas's first four and a half days of operation, Gingrich boasted in his Mayflower-ballroom speech, "a hundred and seventy-five thousand documents were downloaded"—the real number, according to the Library of Congress, was forty-four thousand—"twenty-eight thousand citizens accessed the system, and twenty-five hundred institutions accessed the system."

Thomas (named after Thomas Jefferson) is classic Gingrich: a public-spirited little invention that no one in the power élite can openly object to, but one that is, in fact, meant to leach power away from that élite. When it is fully operational, Thomas is expected to be a kind of online C-SPAN, providing universal access to every piece of legislation, to every committee report that Congress produces, as it produces it. "You really want to weaken the Washington lobbyist," Gingrich pro-



"Every now and then, I get an overpowering urge to wear a cowbell."

claims, "there is no single device that weakens 'em better than to simply disseminate the information in real time, so that the people who are paying them to lobby are reading the same documents that they've got, and there's no longer any great advantage to being an insider, because everybody's an insider, as long as you've got access."

The total seriousness with which Gingrich regards the control of information as the primary source of Third Wave power goes a long way to explaining one of his most embarrassing mistakes since the November elections: the hiring of an ideologically sympathetic supporter, the Georgia political-science professor Christina Jeffrey, as House Historian. Gingrich was forced to fire Jeffrey after Democratic opponents of the appointment publicized the fact that she had once objected to the federal funding of a course on the Holocaust and racism in the South on the ground that it failed to present the Nazi or Ku Klux Klan point of view. Much was made of this, and of the question of whether Gingrich knew of Jeffrey's written opposition when he hired her. (Jeffrey argued, after she was fired, that she meant her remarks sarcastically, and no evidence has surfaced to suggest that she was anti-Semitic.) But what is important is the question of why Gingrich hired Jeffrey in the first place.

Why did a politician of such obvious tactical skills commit an act as extraordinarily stupid as filling the nonpartisan position of House Historian with someone who would be regarded as a propagandist? Perhaps the answer is that, if you really believe that those who control the dissemination of information will control the emerging civilization of the Western world, the temptation must be powerful to rig as much information as you can.

On January 10th, three hours before Newt Gingrich addressed the futurists at the Mayflower Hotel, Bill Clinton spoke to a group of students and residents at Carl Sandburg Community College, in Galesburg, Illinois. In style, the Clinton speech was quite different from Gingrich's effort; in tone, however, the Democrat and the Republican struck remarkably similar notes.

The President alluded to Thomas Jefferson (as did the Speaker)—a President, Clinton recalled, "who passionately believed in limited government." Jefferson, father of devolution.

"Our founders established this great country under a Constitution that limits government," Clinton said. "Mostly, it limits what government can do to private citizens and gives us a lot of elbow room to think what we please and say what we please and go where we please and worship God as we please. It also limits government in other ways, dividing it at the state and local, as well as the national, level—the President, the Congress, the courts. But it was set up to allow all of us to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. And it was set up with enough flexibility so that over time we could have the kind of government that we needed as a people—not the kind of people that the government needs, but the kind of government that we need as a people."

Thus far, Clinton's words were unexceptional, the sort of blandly patriotic boilerplate that politicians use to introduce everything from annual budgets to their wives. It was the next, critical statement that conveyed the first rhetorical hints that the President's thinking had become influenced by the very thing that raced the heart of his chief political enemy. "Now we're at another great sea-change period of American history. Everyone knows we are moving to an Information Age from an industrialized age in which all organizations were bigger, more hierarchical, more bureaucratic, to a time which is more flexible, more rapidly changing, more full of opportunity and uncertainty. And so we will have to have some changes in what we expect our government to do, but we have to be clear about our purpose."

Clinton went on to resurrect an old proposal, one that he had often sounded during his 1992 Presidential campaign: that the Federal government help retrain workers for new jobs in the changing economy. But there was a notable difference between what Clinton talked about in 1992 and what he was now outlining in 1995. Then, the idea had been for the government to compel employers to pay to retrain their workers. Now, the approach was strictly devolutionary.

"We propose to take the literally billions of dollars the government now spends on dozens—literally dozens—of training programs and consolidate those programs and make that money directly available to people who are now eligible for it," Clinton told the Sandburg audi-

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ence. "We discovered that we could collapse fifty of these programs and just give you the money if you're eligible for it, and it would make people who are eligible able to get a chit, a voucher for education only worth up to twenty-six hundred dollars a year for two years.

"Now, that's better than having a federal bureaucracy. It's better than giving the money to a state bureaucracy. Everybody in America, just about, is within driving distance of the community college now. We do not need all these separate government programs telling people what to do. We ought to just give you the money if you're eligible for it, and let you bring it here and get a good education."

The next day, Elaine Kamarck, who is a senior policy adviser to Vice-President Gore and in charge of the White House efforts to reform government, cited the new job-retraining-and-education program as a perfect example of how government should function in the new age. In Kamarck's words, the strains of Tofflerian music could also be heard. "This goes beyond devolution to the states," Kamarck said. "It devolves to the level of individual empowerment. It says to people: Forget government. Forget those dumb programs no unemployed person likes anyway. Give people money. Tell them they can use the money to go to school. Keep an eye on the schools to safeguard against scams. Let the people choose where they want to go to school and let them go. This is a classic Information Age paradigm. It's about demassification. It's about individual empowerment."

Bill Clinton, who based his Presidential campaign in part on New Democratic ideas about the shortcomings of liberalism and Big Government, has always paid at least a measure of homage to reducing the role of government. Until recently, however, that idea has always had to compete in the President's mind with an opposing proclivity to vastly enlarge the role of government. It was as if, in policy terms, the President suffered from a binge-purge syndrome.

In its first two years, the Administration did pursue one clear-cut program of governmental limitation, the 1993 National Performance Review, headed by Vice-President Gore. Gore's leadership of what the White House called Reinventing Government was a surprising success, bringing about large staffing cuts, significant savings, and substantial improvements in administrative procedures. The effort was, however, strictly limited, as Gore himself noted in the introduction to his September, 1993, report: "The *National Performance Review* focused primarily on *how* government should work, not on *what* it should do."

Following the collapse of the Administration's health-care reform last fall, Gore, Kamarck, and several others began pushing harder for a sequel to the 1993 effort, Reinventing Government II, that would ask the devolutionary question of *what* the government should actually do with itself. Still, the Administration's devolutionists remained a relatively weak force in the White House, as Clinton, following the advice of his political advisers, positioned himself against the Republican proposals outlined in the Contract with America during the 1994 campaign. The disaster of November abruptly altered the situation. "These ideas were an important part of the President's thinking before November 8th, and we were already heading down this direction, but the election had the effect of throwing the ideas into higher relief, putting greater focus on them, putting us into higher gear," one White House policy adviser said.

The governmental disarmament race began publicly and in earnest on December 19th, when President Clinton, calling for "a new American government for this new American economy in the twenty-first century," ringmastered an extraordinary spectacle in the White House: a parade of senior Administration officials, each trying to outdo the last in empire unbuilding. Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña promised to transform the Federal Aviation Administration's forty-thousand-employee air-traffic-control operation into a "corporate-like structure." Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros, declaring that "many aspects of this department are simply indefensible," proposed to eliminate the department's chief function, the management of low-income-housing programs, and replace it with a plan to give qualified applicants vouchers for housing and let housing projects compete for customers. Deputy Energy Secretary William H. White offered to eliminate the First World War-era Naval Petroleum Reserves in California. General Services Administration head Roger

Johnson pledged to cut his agency by fifty per cent or more. Not to be outdone, James B. King, the director of the Office of Personnel Management, said he would cut his staff by a third and his agency's spending by half.

"What the elections did was, in an odd way, useful," Kamarck argues. "Against the absolutely unalterable Republican hostility to government, some of the radical reinventions we are talking about begin to seem like less radical ideas. Some of the things we have been able to accomplish since November would have been impossible before. But now things like Henry Cisneros's proposed reorganization of HUD are seen against the Republican talk of abolishing the entire agency, and they don't seem so radical."

The problem for the White House in the climate of the moment, however, lies not in seeming too radical but in seeming insufficiently so. It has not escaped the bitter attention of many Clinton officials that the Administration is being outshined in an area in which they can lay legitimate claim to being pioneers. "It's just a fascinating thing," one senior adviser to the President says. "Gingrich cuts a thousand Hill employees and it leads the evening news. We cut a hundred thousand employees out of the federal government and it never led the evening news." Struggling for relevancy—even for attention—the White House is working desperately to find fresh functions to eliminate.

This effort, Kamarck says, is in keeping with the Toffler / Gingrich vision of Third Wave America. "Bill Clinton and Al Gore and Newt Gingrich are all trying, in their own ways, to lead politics and government in America into this new age," Kamarck says. "They each carry with them their own outlooks of experience and party, but they are all looking in the same direction. We don't get into the jargon as heavily [as Gingrich], but we very much understand the same thing.

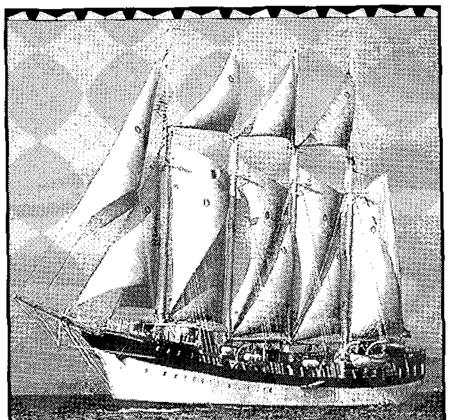
"What we did in the first Reinventing Government revolution was heavily influenced by the revolution in the American business world that Toffler writes about. One fact that struck us—a very Tofflerite fact—was that in the last election there were more individual entrepreneurs voting in the state of California than there were members of labor unions. That tells you something about the demassification going on in the economy. We—the Vice-President and I—spent a lot of time talking to corporate types who had gone through this demassification process. The essential point of the Information Age, we learned, was that, in order to survive, an institution has to be able to move quickly—and large central bureaucracies, whether in the corporate world or in the government, inhibit rapid movement."

As the White House dances to the rhythms of Toffler and the urgencies of politics, the pace is getting frantic. Robert W. Poole, Jr., and William D. Eggers, two of the country's leading experts on privatization, have both been consulted by the White House within recent days. They describe a nearly desperate effort. "They are talking about radical devolution, but they don't have any idea where to go," Eggers says. "They are scrambling to get information on the very nuts and bolts, how to devolve a function, how to shift the taxing mechanisms, how to deal with the mechanics of it. They have a substantial staff they have taken on for this, and they are trying to bring in a lot more people in the next three months."

Poole, who has been asked to come to the White House later this month for a "brainstorming session," says that officials at the National Performance Review have been calling, "wanting everything we can give them on privatization. Just today, we got a call from someone there. He's doing some kind of guideline, a paper that's due within ten days, that is supposed to be a framework document for all the Cabinet agencies, defining all the types of privatization and setting out guidelines for which things they can privatize.

"I never expected this from a Democratic Administration," Poole says. "That's the thing that shocked me. You expect to see Republicans, when they are in power, do this—it's what they've been pushing for years. But to see Democrats doing it, and to see the competition between the White House and the Congress as they race to privatize—it's amazing."

It is amazing. Who would have thought that the death of the New Deal, the remaking of American government, and the next great turning point in American politics would come about because of the prophecies of Alvin Toffler, the dreams of Newt Gingrich, and the ambivalences of Bill Clinton? ♦



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POPULAR CHRONICLES

ORCHID FEVER

How seductive are orchids? Connoisseurs spare nothing for a rare bloom—the issue in a battle between Florida, the Seminoles, and a man with a passion.

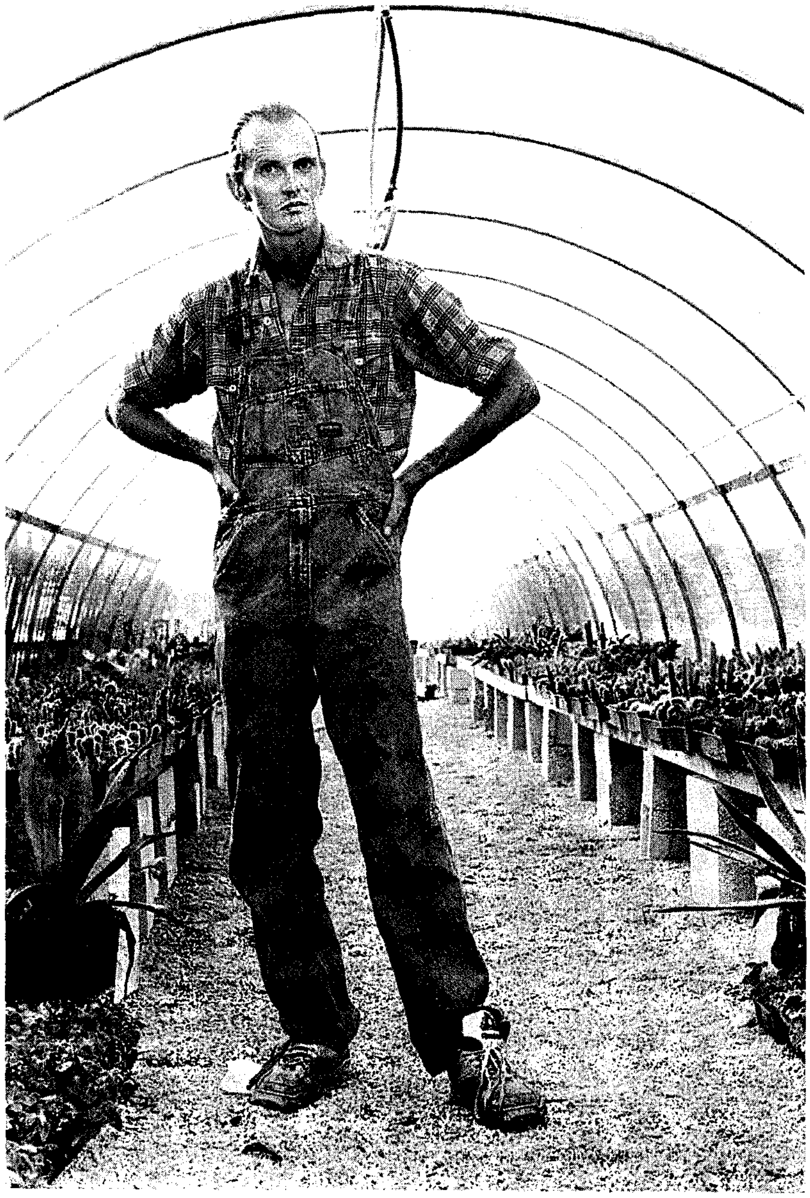
BY SUSAN ORLEAN

JOHN LAROCHE is a tall guy, skinny as a stick, pale-eyed, slouch-shouldered, and sharply handsome, in spite of the fact that he is missing all his front teeth. He has the posture of al dente spaghetti and the nervous intensity of someone who plays a lot of video games. He is thirty-four years old, and works for the Seminole Tribe of Florida, setting up a plant nursery on the tribal reservation near Miami. The Seminole nicknames for Laroche are Crazy White Man and Troublemaker. My introduction to Laroche took place last summer, in the new Collier County Courthouse, in Naples, Florida. The occasion was a hearing following Laroche's arrest for illegally taking endangered wild orchids, which he is passionate about, from the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, which is a place he adores. Laroche did not dress for the occasion. He was wearing wraparound Mylar sunglasses, a cotton-blend shirt printed with some sort of scenic design, and trousers that bagged around his rear. At the hearing, he was called forward and asked to state his name and address and to describe his experience in working with plants. Laroche sauntered to the center of the courtroom. He jutted out his chin. He spoke in a rasping, draggy voice. He stuck his thumbs in his belt loops and said, "I've been a professional horticulturist for approximately twelve years. I've owned a plant nursery of my own.... I have extensive experience with orchids, and the asexual micropropagation of orchids under aseptic cultures." Then he grinned and said to the court, "I'm probably the smartest person I know."

Laroche grew up in Miami. He says he was a weird kid. This is not hard to believe. When he wanted a pet, he bought a little turtle, then bought ten little turtles, then tried to breed them, then started selling turtles to other kids, then decided his life wasn't worth living unless he acquired one of every species of rare turtle, including a three-hundred-pound exotic tortoise from the Galápagos Islands. Suddenly, another passion seized him. He became immersed in late-Ice Age fossils. Then he dropped turtles and Ice Age fossils and became obsessed with lapidary, and then after a while he dropped lapidary and got into collecting and resilvering old mirrors. His passions boil up quickly and end abruptly, like tornadoes. Usually, the end is accompanied by a dramatic pronouncement. When he was in his teens, he went through a tropical-fish phase, and he had sixty fishtanks in his house. He even went skin-diving for the fish himself. Then the end came. He didn't merely lose interest in collecting fish: he renounced it, as if he had kicked a habit. He declared that he would stop collecting fish forever. He also declared that he would never set foot in the ocean again. That was fifteen years ago. He lives a few miles from the Atlantic, but he has not gone near it since.

Laroche has the conversational manner of a Mr. Encyclopedia. This is not the result of rigorous and extensive formal education. He went to high school in North Miami, but beyond that he is self-taught. In fact, it is almost impossible to imagine him in a classroom. On occasion, he gets wistful about the life he might have had if he had applied himself conventionally. He believes he could have gone to medical school and become a brain surgeon. He would have become distinguished and rich. Instead, he lives at home with his father and has mostly made a living in uncustomary ways. For instance, he once sold to a gardening journal an article he called "Would You Die for Your Plants?" This was after he had spilled granular pesticide into a cut on his hand—an incident that left him with permanent heart and liver damage and the persistent feeling that his experience would make a good and salable story. He is now writing a guide to tissue-culturing plants at home, which he plans to advertise in *High Times*, the marijuana magazine. The ad will ask for a lot of money for the guide but will neglect to mention that any marijuana grown following Laroche's precise methods will never mature enough to have any psychoactive properties. He defends this by saying that it will earn him money, it will teach kids how to grow plants, it will keep them from actually getting high, and it will give them an object lesson in how crime doesn't pay. The spiral of logic entwining altruism and rule-breaking around a possible financial outcome is a Laroche specialty. Just when you think you've figured out that he's a crook, he reveals an ulterior and principled but lucrative reason for his crookedness. He loves doing things the hard way, if it means he gets to do what he wants and leaves you wondering how he got away with it. He is the most moral amoral person I've ever known.

When he was growing up, Laroche and his mother would hike through the Fakahatchee Strand and other South Florida swamps, looking for unusual things. At the time, Laroche and his parents were living in North Miami. Laroche's father, a construction worker, had broken his back in a fall from a building and was disabled. Laroche was the only surviving child; a sister had died at an early age. "We're a family of ailments and pain," Laroche says. He describes his mother, who died in 1988, as overweight, frumpy, Jewish by birth but serially passionate about different faiths. She doesn't sound like someone who would tramp through sloppy, sweaty backcountry, but that is how she and John spent many days. Sometimes they would tag orchids that were in bloom and come back a few months later to see if they had formed any seeds. For a while, Laroche's passion was to photograph every single species of orchid in bloom in Florida; he and his mother would trudge through the swamp, carrying cameras, for hours on end.


John Laroche in the greenhouse. New orchids are created or discovered every day. To desire orchids is to have a desire that can never be fully requited.

LAURA WILSON

As he got older, Laroche went from wanting pictures of orchids to wanting orchids themselves. He got married in 1983, when he was twenty-three, and that same year he and his wife opened a nursery in North Miami. Before that, he worked in construction but, just like his father, he broke his back in a fall and went on disability leave. He and his wife called their nursery the Bromeliad Tree. (Bromeliads are spiny plants that usually, like epiphytic orchids, attach themselves to tree limbs instead of sprouting in soil. Some of them grow wild in the Fakahatchee.) Laroche's nursery specialized in the oddest, rarest stuff. He had forty thousand plants, including some that were the only specimens of their kind in cultivation. Laroche says that in 1990 he showed up at the World Bromeliad Conference with an astonishing twelve-by-twenty-five-foot display featuring star-shaped bromeliads, Day-Glo paint, black light, and Christmas lights arranged in the shape of actual constellations.

The conference was a turning point for him. He became well known in the plant community and began calling people all over the world for leads to unusual plants; his phone bills were sometimes close to a thousand dollars a month. Lots of money flew back and forth, but he kept almost none of it. Once, he spent hundreds of dollars building a little air-conditioned box for a rare fern he got from a friend in the Dominican Republic. The fern died. Laroche has never regretted the expense. He accumulated one of the country's largest collections of *Cryptanthus*, a genus of Brazilian bromeliad. He had a startling, six-foot-tall *Antherium veitchii* with corrugated leaves that he says was "a gorgeous, gorgeous son of a bitch." He had dozens and dozens of orchids. He particularly enjoyed cloning them and mutating them. He also figured out how to propagate certain species that had rarely been propagated in a lab.

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his house to talk about plants and to admire his collection. People would give him plants in exchange for his leading them on hikes through the Fakahatchee just so they could look at a plant that interested them. One afternoon, while I was visiting him in his office, at the Seminole plant nursery, he began to talk about the amazing adaptability of plants, and mentioned that the plant with the largest bloom in the world, the rafflesia, lives parasitically in the roots of a tree and eventually devours its host. He said that back when he had his nursery many people would call him to talk about plants, but he could tell that they were just lonely and wanted to talk to someone, or that they were competitive and wanted to test their knowledge against his. He said, "I felt sometimes like they were going to consume me. I felt like they were the parasite plant and I was the big host tree."

THE Orchidaceae are a family of perennial plants with one fertile stamen and three-petalled flowers that, depending on the species, can be anything from pale specks to voluptuous masses. Generally speaking, orchids seem to drive people crazy. The people who love orchids love them madly, but the passion for orchids is not necessarily a passion for beauty. Something about the form of an orchid makes it seem almost more like a creature than a flower. Many orchids are strange-looking, and others have bizarre shapes and jarring color combinations, and all orchids are rather ugly when they aren't in flower. Laroche told me that many species are so plain that when he shows them to people they invariably ask him what they will look like when they bloom, and he has to explain that they already are blooming. Orchids have adapted to almost every environment on earth. They can be mutated, crossbred, and cloned. They can take the form of complex architectural structures or of garish, glamorous, luscious flowers. Not surprisingly, orchids have all sorts of sexual associations; few other flowers are as plainly erotic in appearance or effect. Even other creatures find orchids alluring. Some orchids are shaped exactly like the insect that pollinates them; the insect is drawn inside thinking it has found its mate.

Orchid collecting began in Victorian England as a hobby for the very rich—people with enough land for greenhouses and enough money to sponsor expeditions to where the rarest species could be found. The hobby grew so consuming that it was known in Victorian times as orchidelirium, because a sort of mania seized collectors. Many seemingly normal people, once smitten with orchids, become less like normal people and more like John Laroche. At an orchid show in New York last year, I heard the same story over and over—how one orchid in the kitchen led to a dozen, and then to a back-yard greenhouse, and then, in some cases, to multiple greenhouses and collecting trips to Asia and Africa and an ever-expanding budget to service this desire. I walked around the show with a collector from Guatemala. He said, "The bug hits you. You can join A.A. to quit drinking, but once you get into orchids you can't do anything to kick."

Collecting can be a sort of lovesickness. If you begin collecting living things, you are pursuing something imperfectible, and even if you manage to find them and then possess them, there is no guarantee they won't die or change. The botanical complexity of orchids and their mutability makes them perhaps the most compelling and maddening of all collectible living things. There are nearly twenty thousand named species of orchids—it is the largest flowering-plant family on earth. New orchids are being created in laboratories or discovered every day, and others exist only in tiny numbers in remote places. To desire orchids is to have a desire that can never be fully requited. A collector who wants one of every orchid species will die before even coming close.

A CALAMITOUS frost in South Florida in 1989 killed off a lot of nursery stock, including some of Laroche's, and then, in 1991, a bad batch of fungicides killed orchids and other plants in greenhouses all around the country. Laroche had barely anything left. Three years earlier, a drunk driver had run into his car; the accident knocked out Laroche's front teeth, put his wife in a coma for several weeks, and killed his mother and uncle. He and his wife later separated, which he says now was because he realized that she could sit through an entire Grateful Dead album and he could not.

Then, in August of 1992, Hurricane Andrew struck. At the time, Laroche had his remaining plants in three different greenhouses, in Miami and Homestead. In the storm, two of the three greenhouses vanished entirely. The third more or less exploded. When he went to examine that third greenhouse, he came upon a hash that he recognized as one of his plants; it was in the middle of the road about three blocks from where the greenhouse had been. Salt water carried inland by the storm poisoned the rest. At that point, he had been in the plant business for about twelve years. He had been a famous plant person. Laroche decided then and there that he would die of a broken heart if he ever opened his own nursery again.

The Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc., didn't have a nursery, but the idea of starting one was among many self-help projects contemplated by the tribe. The Seminoles own ninety thousand acres in Florida. Unemployment in the tribe is nearly forty per cent. The Seminoles' plan was to hire a white man with expertise, let him get the nursery going and teach tribe members as much as possible, and then eventually replace the white manager with a member of the tribe. The Seminoles ran an ad in the paper. John Laroche saw it, applied, and was hired by the tribe. Of course, he was temperamentally disinclined to do the job the easy way. He decided to make the nursery something spectacular. He wanted to cultivate exotic things—spinach that grows on vines, pumpkins that can be trained onto a trellis, hot peppers shaped like penises, a hundred varieties of what he calls "weird-ass vegetables." He also wanted to build a laboratory for cloning orchids. He was not interested in corsage orchids: he wanted to cultivate rare endangered species that are now available only on the black market. If he succeeded, he would wreak havoc on the illegal plant trade—a prospect that appealed to him, especially if he could do it by some Laroche-style convoluted means.

After he was hired by the Seminoles, Laroche's new passion became Indian law. He spent hours in the University of Miami law library. He studied the State of Florida's case against the Miccosukee Indians for poaching palm fronds. He learned the tortuous history of the State of Florida v. James E. Billie, in which the government tried, unsuccessfully, to convict Chief Billie, the chairman of the Seminole tribal council, for shooting, skinning, and eating an endangered species of panther. When his research was done, Laroche was convinced he had found a loophole in the state code which exempted Seminoles from laws protecting rare plants.

ORCHIDS first evolved in the tropics, but there are now orchids all over the world, broadcast by air currents. The seeds of an orchid are dark and tiny and as fine as gunpowder; one hurricane can carry millions of them thousands of miles. A strong enough gust and a few seedpods from South America could export enough prom corsages to Miami to last until the end of time. Winds blowing into Florida drop seeds in swimming pools and barbecue pits and on highways and shuffleboard courts and hotel parking lots and the roofs of office buildings, and also in places that are tranquil and damp and warm, where the seeds can germinate and grow. Many seeds crossing the Gulf of Mexico probably drop and die along the way, but any that stay aloft and then fall someplace like the Fakahatchee have a chance to thrive. At the turn of the century, the Fakahatchee was filled with so many orchids of so many different species that it was like an orchid supermarket.

The last comprehensive survey of the Fakahatchee's plants was done in 1987. It listed forty-five orchid species. One species, known as the Fakahatchee ladies'-tresses orchid (*Spiranthes lanceolata* var. *paludicola*), was first described in the Fakahatchee. Ten species found here exist nowhere else in the United States—the rattail orchid, the crooked-spur orchid, the dwarf epidendrum, the twisted orchid, Gale's orchid, the false water spider, Harris's tiny orchid, the hidden orchid, the small-flowered maxillaria, and the frosted-flower orchid. Most of these are homely, with skinny roots and spindly leaves and puny flowers. People who like the fat, flamboyant orchids would find these plants enormously disappointing. On the other hand, a real collector—the sort Laroche has come to be and to know—would find them irresistible if he or she were trying to amass a comprehensive collection; they could also be crossbred with greenhouse plants

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The only really pretty orchid in the Fakahatchee is the ghost. When it is out of bloom, the ghost, which is leafless, looks like flat green straps about the width of linguine. Once a year, when it blooms, the ghost is lovely. The flower is as white as paper. In the center is the intricate lip that is characteristic of all orchids. The ghost's lip is particularly pronounced and pouty, and each of its two corners tapers into a long, fluttery tail. The shape, the delicacy, and the quivery sensitivity of these slender tails makes the flower look like feathers or the legs of a ballerina or two little flags. Because it is leafless and grows on trees, and because the root system blends into the tree or rock it wraps around, the bloom of the ghost can appear invisibly suspended, as if it were a creature in flight. The whiteness of the flower is startling against the gray and green of the swamp. The species is temperamental, difficult to propagate, rarely seen in cultivation, hard to find in the wild. Once when I was at the Fakahatchee, one of the rangers got a phone call from a woman in Georgia who will spend whatever it takes to see the ghost orchid in bloom. She wanted to know if the ranger had seen any that were ready to flower. After talking to him, she left work and got on a plane to Florida and rented a car and hiked into the swamp the following day. No amount of money in the world would have made a difference, because the ghost orchid the ranger had seen had by then lost its bloom and was once again just a tangle of roots on a tree. Carlyle Luer, the author of "The Native Orchids of Florida," the definitive guide to the subject, once wrote of the ghost orchid, "Should one be lucky enough to see a flower, all else will seem eclipsed."

On December 21, 1993, Laroche and three Seminole men who were working with him at the nursery—Dennis Osceola, Vinson Osceola, and Russell Bowers—went into the Fakahatchee and walked through the long cypress strands, over the bunchy cypress domes, and through the muck to a deep-swamp section known as West Lake. The twenty-first was a muggy day. The men left their van on William Janes Scenic Drive, a gravel road that forks off State Road 29 a few miles south of Copeland Road State Prison. It was an unusual place to park. When a ranger on patrol saw the van, he decided to stop and wait until its occupants returned.

"I hear we went platinum."

Some time passed. Finally, the four men emerged from the woods. They were carrying several garbage bags and pillowcases. After they were arrested, they opened the bags and pillowcases, so the ranger could tag and photograph what they had taken from the swamp—a hundred and thirty-six plants, including *Catopsis nutans* (nodding catopsis), *Tillandsia pruinosa* (fuzzy-wuzzy air plant), *Peperomia obtusifolia* (Florida peperomia), and dozens of wild orchids. In the pillowcases were crooked-spur, clamshell, butterfly, brown, night, rigid, twisted, and shiny-leaf orchids, and several specimens of the much admired, highly prized, rare white-flowered species *Polyrrhiza lindenii*—the ghost.

The ranger who wrote up the charges and the prosecutor who filed the official report weren't sure whether the Seminoles were working for Laroche or whether Laroche was working for the Seminoles. On the one hand, Laroche had been hired by the tribe to set up a plant nursery on the reservation, but, on the other hand, Laroche was a nurseryman who had lost his own plants and needed new ones. He knew where to find rare plants for free, and he could have been using the Seminoles to circumvent the law. What was clear was that the plants the four men had collected were rare and valuable, and that they had been harvested carefully. The epiphytic species—the ones that grow attached to tree limbs—had been left on their branches. It was also clear that the person who understood the value of all these plants, and knew what to do with them, was John Laroche.

One day after the arrest, I drove to the headquarters of the tribe, which is in Hollywood, on the second-smallest Seminole reservation in Florida. At the north end of the reservation is Santa's Magical Village Holiday Theme Park. Nearby is a statue of a Seminole wrestling an alligator. The sculptor had used an acquaintance of his as a model for the statue, even though the acquaintance wasn't an Indian—the sculptor just happened to think the man had a good Indian-like build. The statue was made in the fifties, and the model was John Laroche's father.

The biggest trailer at the Seminole

headquarters belongs to Buster Baxley, the tribe's director of planning and development. Baxley is a husky man in his early forties. He has brown eyes, silky jowls, and hair the color of a basketball. He took me to Seminole Gardens, the tribe's nursery, which is a few minutes from the tribe headquarters and down the street from the Independent Bible Baptist Chickee Church. Laroche's office is in another flimsy trailer, on the edge of the nursery property. Except for the trailer, nothing had yet sprouted at Seminole Gardens. As Baxley and I pulled into the lot, Vinson Osceola and two other men were standing near the trailer, looking at a pile of metal hoops and nylon netting. There was little else in sight except a stack of sawhorses and cedar planters, and some plastic bags bursting with mulch. Laroche was inside at his desk, reading a postcard he had just received from a friend of his named Walter. He said that Walter is crazy about water lilies, and will travel anywhere in the world at a moment's notice if he hears about a rare one. Sometimes Walter collects the plant, to grow at home, and sometimes he just takes a look at it. The postcard was from Botswana. Laroche held it up and read it. "He says, 'Plants are good. See you soon.' " He put down the card and said, "Walter's pretty crazy."

Baxley stood in the doorway of the office and ignored Laroche's reading of the card. He waved his hand toward the window and said, "John, how're those boys working out?"

Laroche said, "Fine, Buster." He put his feet up on the desk and started rocking back and forth in his chair. He was wearing camouflage pants, a Miami Hurricanes hat, and a Chicago Blackhawks T-shirt.

Baxley said, "Everyone thought John was exploiting those Indian boys so he could do his poaching and set his own nursery up. Well, I was the one who authorized it. I told them to go out and gather what they needed. John brought me the Florida statute he found saying Indians were exempt from the laws about plant gathering, and we thought that the nursery should have some of the wild plants for propagation and a display. I questioned him about it several times, because I wanted to be sure about it, and I put him off for about a month, because I wanted to do the research myself."

Laroche pulled his face into an expression of mock horror and said, "Buster! You didn't believe me?"

Baxley said, "Then, at first, when they were all arrested, we thought it was discrimination against us and against the tribe. Now I think that if those rangers had just caught the Indian boys, they would have let them go. They don't want to mess around with us, with Indian rights. We hold nature close to us! We're not like the non-Indian who strips the land just to make a buck. We don't hunt just to hunt. We hunt to survive! The State of Florida better not mess around with what's my right." He puffed his chest and said, "Otherwise, I'll go in there and take every single thing in the Fakahatchee that's alive."

Laroche stopped rocking in his chair and crashed forward onto the desk. He frowned and said, "Aaaaaw, come on now, Buster."

Baxley looked at him and then looked back at me and said, "The rangers didn't want those Indians. It's John here they wanted to skin alive."

Baxley decided to go back to his office and do some paperwork on a joint citrus-growing venture between the Seminoles and some Japanese investors. Laroche and I went out to his van. Laroche wanted to go visit some plants of his that had survived the hurricane and had then been sold to a nursery called Tropical Paradise. Outside, the sky was gauzy and the air felt like glue. The workmen had staked up some of the metal hoops for potting areas. Vinson Osceola came over to us, carrying a spade. He is a young man with long, glossy hair, meaty shoulders, and a shy, slightly tearful gaze. He and Laroche talked for a few minutes about the construction project. He mentioned that Dennis Osceola had been injured and wasn't doing nursery work for the time being, and that Russell Bowers, the other defendant in the orchid poaching, was currently "off the res."

"I'm not going to talk to you too much," Osceola said to me. "It's not personal. It's the Indian way."

Laroche talked while we drove. "Originally, the Indians just wanted to dig up some stuff on the reservation and sell it. So I explained the nursery business to them. I said, 'You can dig stuff up and sell it, but it's better to propagate.' I explained to them that you can

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tissue-culture orchids, clone them, and from one you can get billions. I've always been into propagation. I was big on plant mutation, too—mutating for fun and profit. You expose seeds to radiation or chemicals and you get cool stuff that's never been seen before on earth. It's a great little hobby, plant mutation. You compress the evolution of life into one or two years. I think it's good for the world to promote it as a hobby. There are a lot of wasted lives out there, and people with nothing to do. To me, mutation is the answer to everything. Have you ever wondered why some people are smarter than other people? It's because they mutated when they were babies. I think I was one of those people. I got exposed to something that mutated me, and I'm now incredibly smart. I'm one of only five or six people in the entire country who know how to propagate the ghost orchid in a plant laboratory. My plan is to take some orchids out of the wild, sell some now, cultivate the rest in the laboratory we're building at the nursery, and in a few years have thousands to sell. Right now, there's a black market in these orchids, especially the ghosts, because you can't get them. There's big money in it. They have a huge value in places like Australia, where people love orchids and can't get these varieties. The price would come down on each individual plant, but we'd be able to sell millions of them once we got them into cultivation, so we'd still make a ton of money. My plant friends used to say, 'If John ever gets some land and some money, watch out.' Well, the Indians needed a nurseryman, and I needed some land and some money, and I researched the law and realized that it was really vague about the Indians' taking things out of state preserves. I think the law is messed up and it ought to be changed, because I don't think you ought to have a bunch of Indians just running through the Fakahatchee pulling up plants, but in the meantime someone's going to get the benefit of the law being the way it is now, and I figure it might as well be me."

We drove down a gravel road lined with chubby palm trees. A steamy breeze was blowing past my open window. The sun coming through the palm fronds painted stripes across the road. He said, "I figured that we'd get what we needed out of the Fakahatchee and at the same time we'd bring so much attention to the law that the legislature would change it. I timed it so that it would be in time for the legislative session. That's what I want to say in court. I want to say that the state needs to protect itself." He raised an eyebrow at me. "I'm planning to protect myself, too."

We banged across some railroad tracks. Laroche turned toward me and said, "I'm working for the Seminoles, but I'm really on the side of the plants. The law shouldn't let anybody go out there and pull up the damn plants. Is what I did ethical? I don't know. I'm a shrewd bastard. I could be a great criminal. I could be a great con man, but it's more interesting to live your life within the confines of the law. People look at what I do and think, Is that moral? Is that right? Well, isn't every great thing the result of that kind of thinking? Look at something like atomic energy. It can be diabolic or a blessing. Evil or good. Well, that's where the give is. The edge of ethics. And that's where I like to live."

At Tropical Paradise, Laroche tried to persuade the owner, Joseph Fondeur, to let him buy back the plants he had sold to Fondeur after the hurricane. The plants in question were huge hoyas with rubbery leaves and long, snaky vines. Fondeur said he was not interested in selling the hoyas back to Laroche. Laroche pointed out that he now had a large nursery on the reservation and was able once again to give the hoyas a suitable home.

"Not interested," Fondeur said, stroking a hoya leaf.

"I'm coming back for them," Laroche said. "Come on, Joseph."

Fondeur stroked another leaf. "No. I love them now. At this point, they're really mine, not yours."

They talked for a moment. Fondeur agreed that when the plants reproduced he would give some of the little ones to Laroche. Then Fondeur mentioned that he likes a wide variety of plants and was keeping the orchid inventory at his nursery to a minimum. "Orchid people are too crazy," he said. "They buy the orchid and they kill it. Fern people might even be the worst, but the orchid people are too—oh, you know. They think they're superior." He looked at Laroche and said, "You collecting anything now?"

"No," Laroche said. "I don't want to collect anything right now. I have to watch myself around plants. Even now, I still get that feeling. I'll see something and I'll get that feeling— I'll think to myself, Jesus Christ, that's interesting. Boy, I'll bet you could find a lot of those."

THE American Orchid Society was worried about the orchid-poaching case; if Laroche and the Seminoles were found innocent, it could start a run on orchids growing on public land everywhere. The society's headquarters are in West Palm Beach, just about a hundred and fifty miles from the Collier County Courthouse, down a highway called Alligator Alley. Florida panthers used to wander across the traffic lanes of Alligator Alley. Before Chief Billie shot his panther, the last panther to die of unnatural causes in South Florida had been hit by a speeding vehicle on Alligator Alley. The society has almost thirty thousand members. At the office, you can sign up for an Orchid Society Visa card, which is imprinted with a picture of a yellow *Brassolaeliocattleya* with a reddish lip as full and shapely as a handbag. You can also look at fifty thousand color slides of award-winning orchids, including slides of the most valuable orchids in the world—for instance, a *Phragmipedium besseae* lady-slipper, with slim blood-red petals and a crimson lip. If you desperately wanted this lady-slipper orchid, you might be able to buy one for several hundred dollars; ten years ago, before anyone had propagated it in a nursery, this *Phragmipedium* was extremely rare, and it cost five thousand dollars.

The orchid-poaching case was eventually resolved not on the matter of the orchids but on the matter of the trees, which everyone—Laroche, Baxley, the prosecutor, and the rangers in the Fakahatchee—knew was not the real question but the only clear one left once you sorted out the law. As the law is currently written, Indians are arguably immune from statutes protecting endangered plants anywhere—in state preserves, in private back yards, or on a Seminole reservation. If Bowers and the Osceolas had taken only endan-

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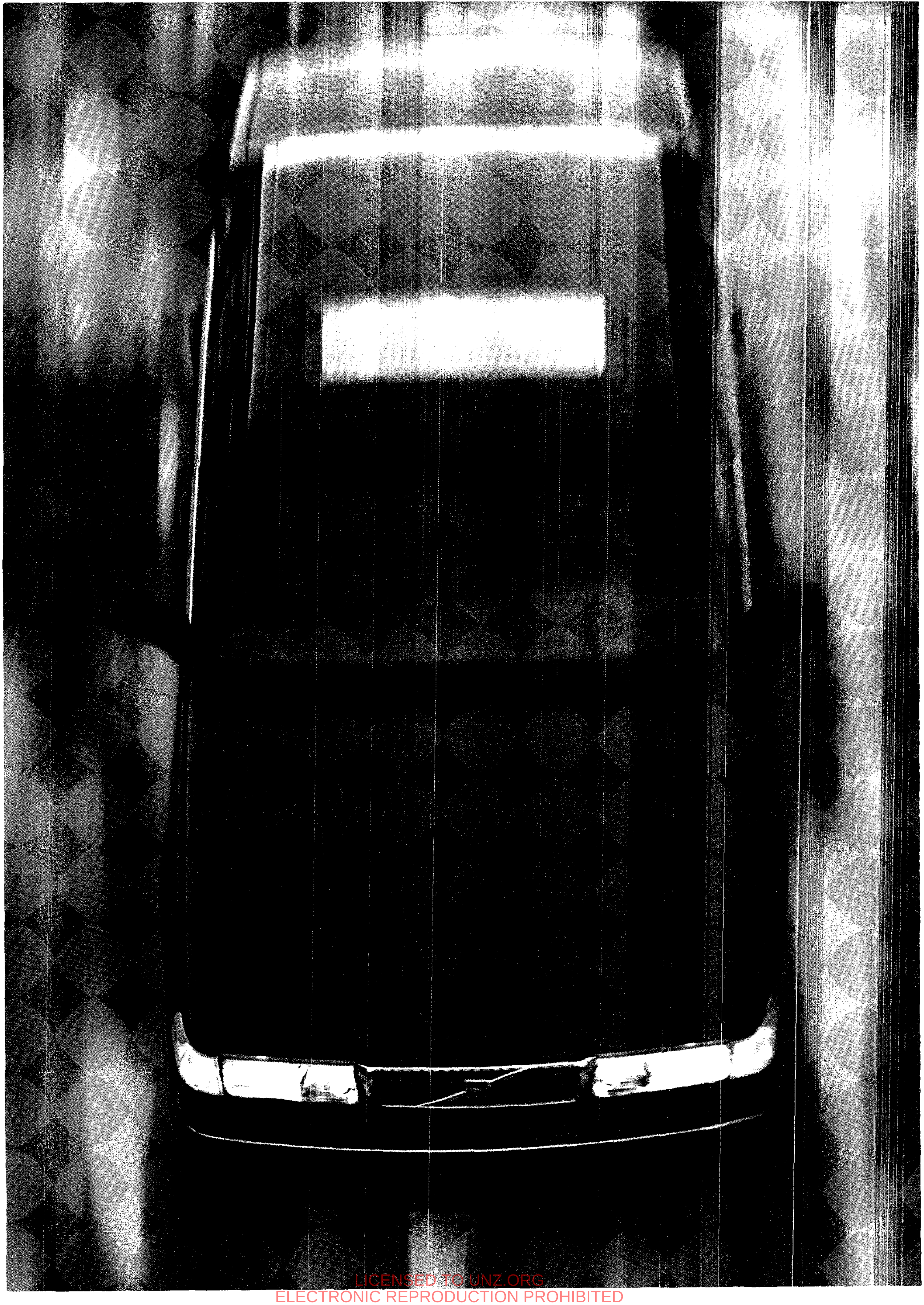

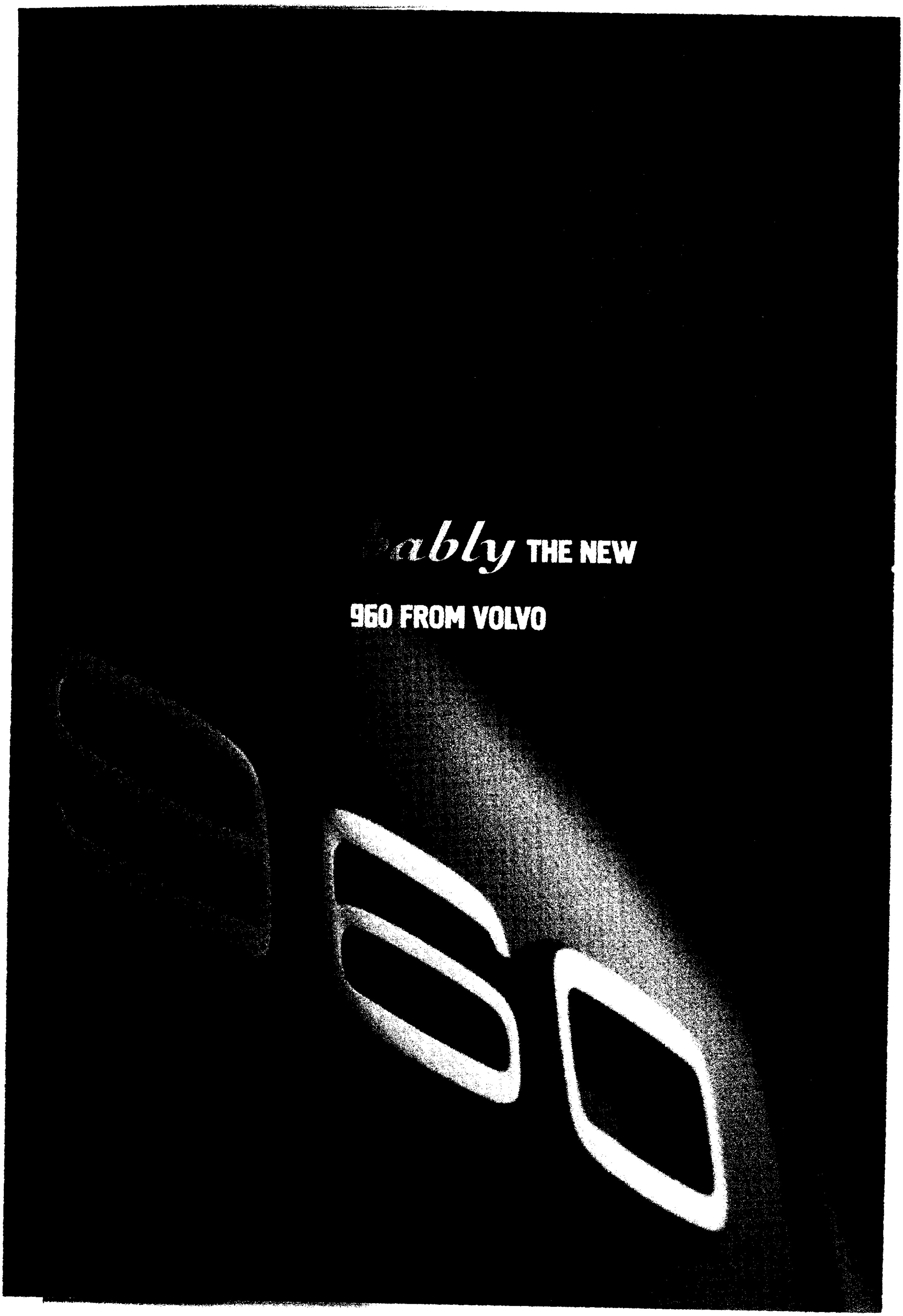
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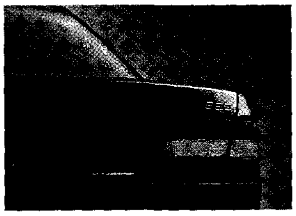

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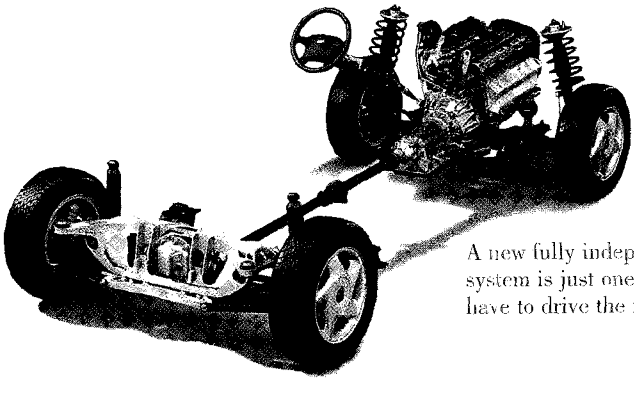

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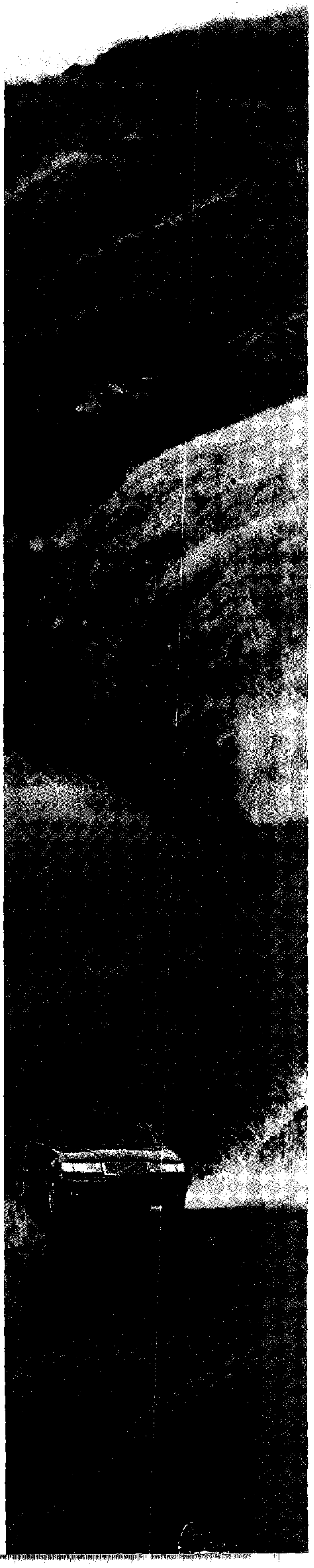

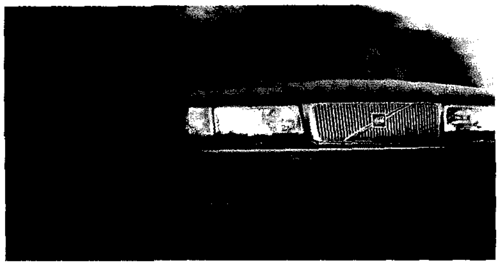

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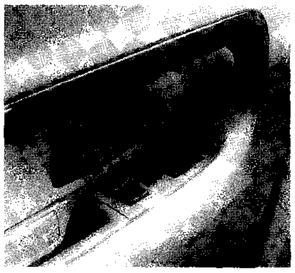

It is from this merging of concep

Controls for the power windows and power adjustable side view mirrors have been thoughtfully nestled close at hand.

was born.

A twenty-four valve engine delive

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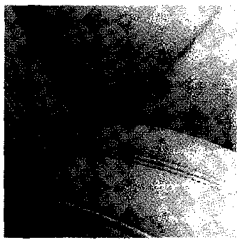

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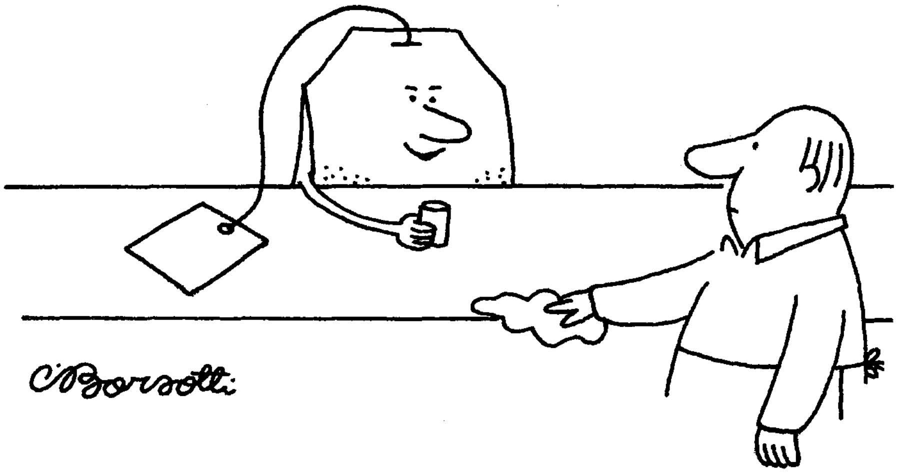
gered plants, they might have been able to claim complete immunity, and the charges might have been dropped. But most of the orchids Laroche wanted were growing on trees, and he wanted to take them out attached to the branches so their roots wouldn't be damaged. The trees orchids love to grow on—pond apples and common swamp growth—are not endangered. At the hearing, Judge Brenda C. Wilson refused to dismiss the entire case on the grounds of immunity, but the Seminoles were not charged with possession of an endangered species. In that sense, Laroche was right—he had uncovered a basic contradiction in the law. His only mistake was that they had been too painstaking in the way they removed the orchids. A few weeks later, the three Seminoles decided to plead no contest to Florida Administrative Code 16D-2.003 (6), which forbids removal of plant life from state parks, for cutting up trees and taking plants from the state preserve.

Laroche was granted no immunity—the Judge ruled that Indian immunity does not extend to non-Indian tribe employees—so he either had to go to trial or plead no contest to removing both the flowers and the trees. He took the plea. He had to pay a fine and court costs and he was placed on six months' probation, during which he is not allowed into the Fakahatchee Strand. He had won and lost. He had found the loophole in the law but lost the case; found the orchids but lost the right to keep them; and found himself famous but slightly disgraced. He told me that he thought he had been crucified. He seemed animated by the tension of the events, and by the fact that he was right and wrong simultaneously. This put him on the ethically narrow ledge that he considers his favorite place. The one other thing he lost, for now, is the Fakahatchee, which is another favorite place of his.



"Where can a fellow find some loose tea in this town?"

• •

YOU have to want something very badly to be willing to go looking for it in the Fakahatchee. The Fakahatchee Strand is a preserve of sixty-three thousand coastal lowland acres, about twenty-five miles southeast of Naples, in that part of Collier County where satiny lawns and golf courses give way to wild saw grass with edges as sharp as scythes. Part of the Fakahatchee is deep swamp, part is cypress stand, part is wet woods, part is estuarine tidal marsh, and part is parched wet prairie. Over all, the Fakahatchee is as flat as a cracker. Ditches and dents fill up fast with oozing groundwater. Bumps and wrinkles are easy to see. Most of the land is at an elevation of five or ten feet, and some of it is dead even with the sea.

The Fakahatchee has a certain strange, wild beauty. It is also an aggressively inhospitable place. In fact, the hours I spent retracing Laroche's footsteps were probably the most miserable I have spent in my entire life. The swampy part of the Fakahatchee is hot and wet and buggy, and full of cottonmouth snakes and diamondback rattlers and alligators and snapping turtles and poisonous plants and wild hogs and things that stick into you and on you and fly into your nose and eyes. Crossing the swamp is a battle. You can walk through about as calmly as you would walk through a car wash. In the middle of the swamp, the sinkholes are filled with as much as seven feet of standing water, and the air has the slack, drapey weight of wet velvet. Sides of trees look sweaty. Leaves are slick from the humidity. The mud sucks your feet and tries to keep a hold of them; failing that, it settles for your shoes. The water in the swamp is stained black with tannin from the cypress trees, which is so corrosive that it can cure leather. Whatever isn't wet in the Fakahatchee is blasted. The sun pounds the treeless prairies. The grass gets so dry that the friction from a car can set it on fire, and the burning grass can engulf the car in flames. The Fakahatchee used to be littered with burned-up cars that had been abandoned by pan-fried adventurers. A botanist who travelled through the Fakahatchee in the forties recalled in an interview that he was most surprised by the area's interesting variety of squirrels and by the number of charred Model T's.

Before I left Florida, I went into the swamp with the rangers, who had replanted the orchids Laroche had wanted so badly. Some of the plants were tucked into rock crevices and tree crotches. The sections of branches the ghost orchids were attached to had been wired onto the sides of trees. Orchids are slow to grow and slow to die. It will be some time before anyone can tell which of the purloined plants, if any, will survive. These ghost orchids were not blooming, so I went back out the next day and walked for hours to try to find one that was more than a green strap on a tree. I saw some roots, but it seemed as if the moment of their bloom had passed. I called Laroche to tell him this, and he said, "That's not true. They're out there. I know it. I know where they are." The phone was silent for a moment, and then he cleared his throat and said, "You should have gone with me." ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

(*From Ellen Goodman's syndicated column in the San Francisco Chronicle*)

She was the sacrificial lamb who carried the knife around in her own shoot-from-the-hip pocket.

PROFILE

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SOROS

Why did the speculator George Soros suddenly decide to take his life public? It's a move that puzzles observers, who are also wondering if Soros's expanded role as a global trouble-shooter makes him an invaluable one-man foreign-policy machine, as his supporters in the State Department contend, or an unregulated billionaire with a messiah complex.

BY CONNIE BRUCK

On a recent visit to Budapest, George Soros stood across the street from the apartment building where he had lived until he was fourteen, when, during the Nazi occupation, he and other members of his family assumed false identities and went into hiding. The stately building overlooked a small square, full of foliage, and the Danube, just beyond. Soros pointed to a large casement window with a view high enough to clear the trees, and, turning to his twenty-three-year-old son, Jonathan, who was standing beside him, told him that he used to sit there for hours at a time, watching the river flow by. It made a nice tableau—and a cameraman from a British television crew that was working on a documentary about Soros, the multibillionaire speculator and philanthropist, captured it. It has become something of a ritual for Soros, accompanied by camera crews, to visit this site, or the cellar where he hid, or the apartment building where his father constructed another hideout. Just then, a tour bus rolled slowly by. Soros glanced at it, and suddenly burst out laughing, exclaiming to his son, "I can just *hear* the tour director saying, 'And there is Soros, explaining his life.' "

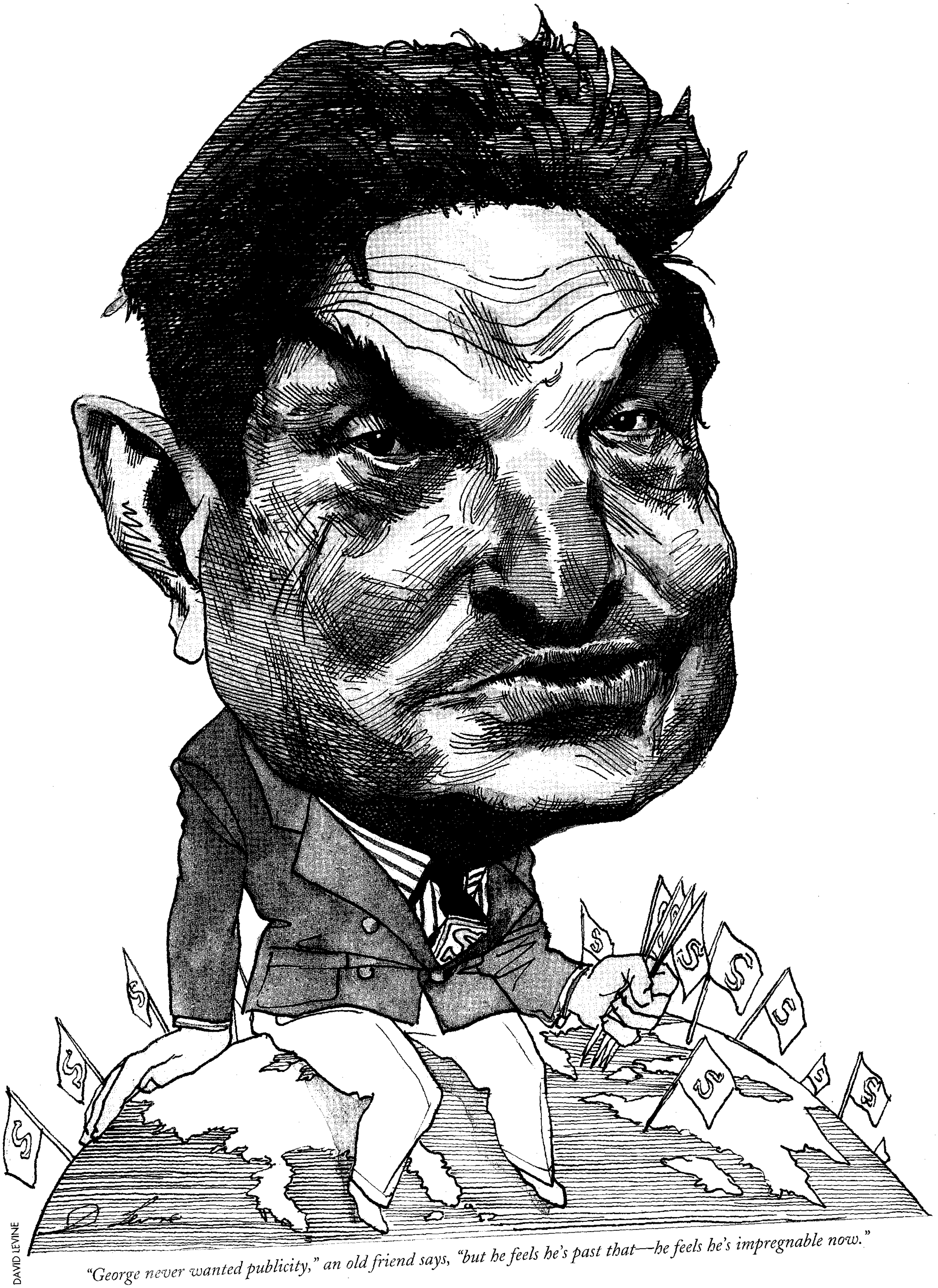
It was not always thus. Soros made his fortune as a speculator in the financial markets, and since 1969 has operated a hedge fund—a little-regulated private investment partnership, geared to wealthy individuals, which typically attempts to achieve quick, outsized returns by making huge, highly leveraged bets. For many years, he, like his colleagues in this secretive, arcane world, treasured anonymity. In philanthropy, too, which Soros began in earnest about ten years ago—when he started a foundation in Budapest which aimed to foster the democratic values of an "open society" as defined by the philosopher Sir Karl Popper, and which supported dissidents living under the Communist regime—he kept a relatively low profile. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, however, he began to reposition himself. He turned over the day-to-day management of the fund to an exemplary trader, Stanley Druckenmiller, and he immersed himself in the world of his foundations—by then, there were four—multiplying their number in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and dramatically accelerating the level of his giving. At the same time, he began to advocate that the West follow his lead, providing aid, in what he often referred to as an updated Marshall Plan, to the countries of the former Communist bloc. "I wanted to get my views across," Soros told me, in a recent interview. "But it was really hard going, because there wasn't a lot of interest in listening. Then came the sterling crisis, and that was the turning point—because suddenly I became a celebrity."

Soros actually made a decision to transform himself into a celebrity—a decision that was as strategic, in its way, as his having positioned himself (much earlier than most people, according to some of his colleagues) to take maximum advantage of the increasingly vulnerable pound sterling. In mid-September of 1992, there was a massive speculators' raid on the pound. The British government sought to defend its level in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism but ultimately surrendered and allowed the currency to be devalued. The defense of the pound had cost the government (and thus British taxpayers) some six billion dollars. Among the biggest winners were commercial banks; investment banks; pension funds; and hedge funds, which had bet large amounts of their capital against the pound. The hedge-fund investors were, however, very quiet, private winners—who saw no advantage in being identified as actors in the drama.

Several weeks after the crisis, though, Soros, an inveterate iconoclast, called an old friend, Anatole Kaletsky, a financial journalist for the London *Times*, and arranged an interview. In Kaletsky's article, Soros stated that, as the press had conjectured, his fund, Quantum, and several of its offshoots had bet roughly ten billion dollars against the pound (about nine billion of which was borrowed, in Soros's customary leveraging). He also said that Quantum's combined speculation, mainly against the pound, had garnered a profit of about two billion dollars. Soros became even more expansive, declaring that in the days before the pound's collapse "we must have been the biggest single factor in the market." Soros's colleagues in the financial community—including some of Quantum's directors and shareholders—were stunned at his public revelations; to this day, many express bewilderment at his action. One person in the hedge-fund community said to me, "Why bring light to this subject? Why bring attention to yourself?"

But where others saw only a downside Soros saw opportunity. Edgar Astaire, who has been friendly with Soros for close to thirty years, told me, "George *never* wanted publicity, but he feels he's past that—he feels he's impregnable now." What Soros wanted, more than anything, was to be heard. He was gambling that he would be able to translate celebrity status in one field (finance) into another (public policy); that celebrityhood was, essentially, generic.

There has been some backlash. Soros funds are involved as co-investors in certain projects in developing countries with the International Finance Corporation, the private-sector arm of the World Bank



DAVID LEVINE

"George never wanted publicity," an old friend says, "but he feels he's past that—he feels he's impregnable now."

Group. Gerard Steeghs, at the World Bank, told me that whenever one of these investments has taken place "someone on the board will say, 'Should this multilateral institution be doing business with Soros?' There is a feeling, among some people, that he did something *indecent* with the pound."

Soros's subsequent philanthropic actions, however, have helped to soften the early negatives. In December, 1992, just three months after Soros made his killing on the pound, he announced in London that he would donate fifty million dollars in humanitarian aid to Bosnia. In addition to that fifty-million-dollar donation, Soros made others of huge proportions: he committed two hundred and thirty million dollars to the Central European University, an English-language graduate school headquartered in Budapest, which he established in 1990; a hundred million dollars to establish a grant-giving program for scientists in the former Soviet Union; and a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar pledge to aid humanities education in Russia.

Soros declares that he is well satisfied with his gamble. "People like the dictator in Romania, Iliescu, suddenly became very interested in meeting me. Before, he considered me beyond the pale," he says. "So in Eastern Europe my influence increased." He adds, "In America, I'm taken more seriously. Also in Europe. So I was able to speak out on issues like Bosnia, for instance, which is what I wanted to do."

He has continued to nurture his celebrityhood, regarding his reputation as "an asset, in a way, that has to be managed." Sensitive to his image as someone who is able to move markets, Soros has done what he can to diminish his aura of financial invincibility. When Quantum, betting on the dollar against the yen, lost six hundred million dollars in one day, in February, 1994, Soros seized the opportunity to publicize that loss (despite the fact that much of it was recovered, because the yen weakened). According to Gary Gladstein, the chief administrator and managing director of Soros Fund Management, Soros said to him at the time, "Let's show people that we're human."

Several years ago, Soros hired a full-time public-relations assistant, who works primarily on the foundation side of his bifurcated life. Soros began to publish pamphlets of all his policy speeches, and he mailed them to hundreds of people worldwide in the business communities, government, academia, and the press. He appears often on TV talk shows. In the summer, Soros invites a crowd of different guests on weekends to his estate in Southampton. Several years ago, the scene there tended to include former dissidents, some dishevelled-looking, sitting around in their bathrobes playing chess with Soros; these days, the group is more polished and increasingly influential, and is marked by a growing Washington contingent.

With the Clinton Administration, Soros, a newly turned Democrat, has made the kind of inroads that he was unable to make before. He still tends to be most valued as a financial guru (one of his Quantum directors told me, "George got in to see Clinton, to talk to him about Bosnia—and all Clinton wanted to talk about was the market"), while his views on foreign policy are often seen as relatively unsophisticated. A high-ranking official in the Administration says, "Sometimes his speeches and articles are overly idealistic. In that sense, people take him with a grain of salt." But he has cultivated excellent relationships with high-ranking officials in the State Department and at Treasury. He has opened a Washington office, which, as one Soros associate told me, will function as "his State Department." While intense lobbying efforts he has made on behalf of Macedonia over the past year or so have not really succeeded, in the last several months he has thrown the weight of his influence and his resources behind achieving Western aid for Ukraine, and there he has won at least a preliminary victory. Recently, too, he said that he intends to focus increasingly on the West, concentrating on finding ways of making "our own open society more viable." He has started programs in the United States devoted to drug policy and to dying, and, as he announced shortly after the November elections, he wants to deal with "the distortion of our electoral process by the excessive use of TV advertising."

FAIRY TALE

and smoke too many cigarettes
and love you so much
—*Frank O'Hara*

It was blowing hot and cold as I sat in the window seat
in a northern town, the heating on in June,
the window sash propped open on a splint of wood
like a tired eye on a matchstick . . .

There was a sign, Thank you for not smoking,
but I didn't want thanks, I wanted to smoke.
I was living on air, cigarettes, pull-ups, and kisses—
puffing away in a daze of longing.

Outside was the delicate viaduct, a redoubt,
a pair of magpies mating. The sun shone,
and there was such a fine rain falling
no rainbow was required.

It struck me I was exactly the person
to write the life of the pink shopping bag
hovering irresolutely
on the triangular intersection below.

It's puzzling how things happen. For years,
the princess lies in the glass coffin of her life,
then fruit on her tongue, and beer,
and salt, your salt.

—MICHAEL HOFMANN

"People in government used to sort of dismiss George—this crazy guy interested in Hungary," said Morton Abramowitz, the former United States Ambassador to Turkey, who is now the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and has participated in a Soros-funded advocacy group on the Balkans. "He's now become a player—but it's very recent, a new phenomenon." Abramowitz went on, "He's untrained, idiosyncratic—he gets in there and *does* it, and he has no patience with government. As I frequently say about George, he's the only man in the U.S. who has his own foreign policy—and can implement it."

When I told Strobe Talbott, the Deputy Secretary of State, about Abramowitz's remark, Talbott, referring to Soros's foreign policy, responded, "I would say that it is not identical to the foreign policy of the U.S. government—but it's compatible with it. It's like working with a friendly, allied, independent entity, if not a government. We try to synchronize our approach to the former Communist countries with Germany, France, Great Britain—*and* with George Soros," he added with a grin.

Talbott also articulated a notion that seems to be popular in some parts of the foreign-policy community these days: since governments have neither the will nor the resources to lead the kinds of initiatives they once did, that vacuum should be filled by the private sector. To Talbott, Soros represents a paradigm of such activity; he even went so far as to say that he considers Soros "a national resource—indeed, a national treasure."

Others, however, describe aspects of Soros that—combined in an individual who possesses a personal war chest of billions of dollars—seem more threatening than venerable. He is portrayed as someone who has always tended to live by his own rules, and will change those when it suits him; who can be offended if a leader of a country where he is involved philanthropically is insufficiently subservient; who will consort with an autocratic regime in order to see his programs carried out; and who is intent on imposing his influence generally on an ever-expanding area of the world. As one person who has had considerable experience in government and is familiar with some of Soros's foreign-policy activities commented, Soros manifests a classic form of hubris. "You go into situations, you have money, you think you can manipulate things," this person said. And even some who count themselves Soros fans take note of a kind of messianism: there is "something pretty megalomaniacal about him," Thomas Simons, Jr., the coördinator of United States assistance to the New Independent States (of the former Soviet Union), said—a tendency, as one supporter put it, "to see himself as the sun, with other planets revolving around him."

Whether national treasure or messianic manipulator, this much is plain: Soros, the archetypal outsider all his life, has finally found a club to which he wants to belong. "George wants very much to be part of the international-policy world," says Aryeh Neier, the longtime executive director of Human Rights Watch, who, in late 1993, became Soros's second-in-command, as president of the Soros foundations. And Soros—who has tested himself against the market and won so many times that it must have come to feel not like testing at all, and winning not like winning—is frank about the pleasure he takes in his new avocation. "There is a certain thrill in dealing with affairs of state," he told me.

FROM this new plateau, Soros, who is sixty-four, surveys his past and, mainly, devises strategies for the future. He is a man who draws the eye in any group: dressed in exquisitely tailored clothes, he is fit and vigorous, with a somewhat avian cast to his features, and a piercing gaze. What most distinguishes him, though, is a consummate sureness, resonant in every syllable of his speech (he has a distinct Hungarian accent), every aspect of his bearing. He has reached a point in his life where he seems to feel that he can move forward quite unencumbered, having resolved many of his personal conflicts, to which he refers quite openly—his unusual preoccupation with

"You can keep the broccoli pin."

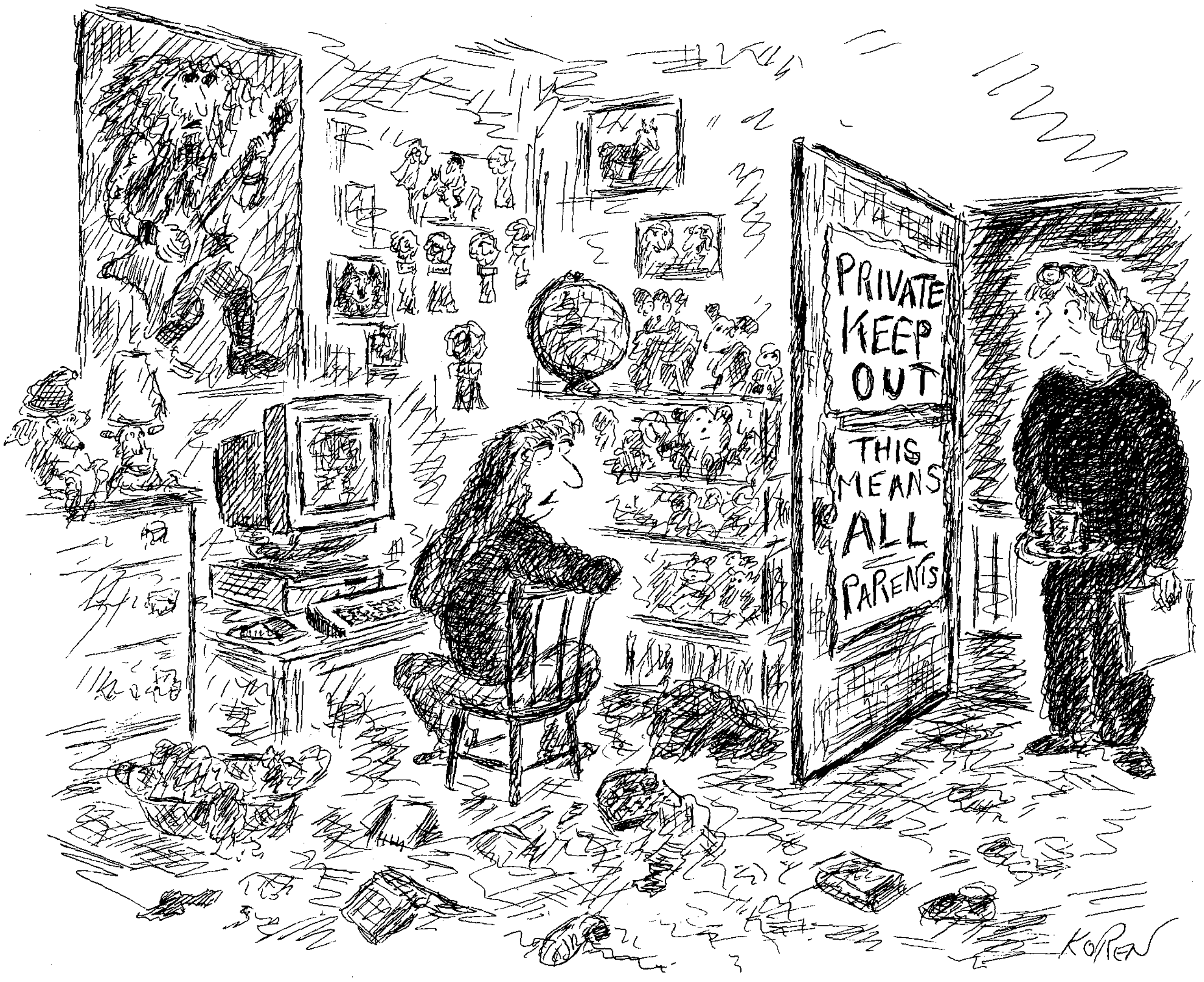
his mortality, for example, or his feeling that he has been a "bad father" to his three grown children, or his feelings about being a Jew.

What has probably been Soros's most intractable problem is the pattern of duality and detachment which has been, in effect, the leitmotiv of his life. And now that he has succeeded in creating such a highly visible persona, he says, that duality has become even more troublesome. He traces its origins to 1944—a year that he has said he recalls more vividly than any other in his life—when, aged fourteen, he posed as the son of a Hungarian government official, sometimes accompanying the official as he delivered deportation notices to Jews, or took possession of property owned by them. Self-control and detachment were the keys to survival. Soros recalled that when his mother was questioned at the police station by the local sheriffs, she convinced her interrogators that she was indeed the person her false papers stated she was by an exercise of detachment so extreme that she felt herself to be hovering near the ceiling, observing her bravura performance from above. He added, however, that after she was released she collapsed, suffering what was "kind of a nervous breakdown"—and he was furious at her for showing such weakness.

Sometimes it seems that even today Soros dares not let that control slip; when he was questioned by an interviewer for British TV about that year's experience, Soros rejected the suggestion that it had been traumatic, insisting, rather, that it was "an adventure." But, as his older brother, Paul, told me, they lived with the knowledge that if they were stopped on the street by the police or the military and their false identities exposed, they would at the very least face imprisonment, and they might well be shot; and they saw that happen to others—often at the very edge of the Danube, so the bodies would fall into the river.

That experience notwithstanding, Soros has chosen to exclude Israel and Jewish causes, by and large, from his massive philanthropy—a decision that has caused comment among some of his colleagues in the financial community, particularly those who are strong supporters of Israel. In Hungary, Soros has been subject to anti-Semitic attacks. Referring to being a target, Soros, in his book "Underwriting Democracy," wrote, "I am ready to stand up and be counted." When I mentioned that rather suggestive line to Soros during one of several extended interviews with him, he responded quickly, "Right. It took me a long time."

He continued, "My mother was quite anti-Semitic, and ashamed of being Jewish. Given the culture in which one lived, being Jewish was a clear-cut stigma, a disadvantage, a handicap—and, therefore, there was always the desire to transcend it, to escape it." He confirmed what someone had told me—that his family name had long ago been changed from Schwartz. "So the assimilationist Jews of



"I hate you! You don't understand me and you don't understand my software!"

Hungary had a deep sense of inferiority, and it took me a long time to work through that," he said, adding, however, that he succeeded in doing so many years ago.

He remarked, with a dry chuckle, "Of course, this whole interest in universal ideas is a typical means to escape from the particular."

Was he not, then, still seeking that escape?

"I *am* escaping the particular. I think I am doing exactly that by espousing this universal concept"—of open society. "In other words, I don't think that you can ever overcome anti-Semitism if you behave as a tribe. . . . The only way you can overcome it is if you give up the tribalness."

Soros knows the rebuttal to this argument—indeed, he *lived* it, as one of the assimilationist Jews whom Hitler found so undefended. But he is immovable, riveted in place, and less—his demeanor, at least, suggests—by philosophical conviction than by some psychological imperative. In response to my suggesting that he has a fundamental philosophical difference with Israel, Soros replied, testily, "I don't deny the Jews their right to a national existence—but I don't want to be part of it."

That early experience in Nazi-occupied Hungary, in any event, appears to have been formative, instilling in Soros the impulse to perpetually distance himself—not only from the experience itself and from his Jewishness but from other people and, indeed, much of life. This inner detachment, moreover, came to be outwardly reflected in a strikingly dual existence. He always thought of himself as a philosopher (when he was young, he expected that he would become another John Maynard Keynes or Albert Einstein), and he labored over drafts of theoretical treatises for many years; but at the same time he was notorious in financial markets as a singularly hard-edged, aggressive, and ruthless operator. Considering how he made his fortune—in the amoral realm of the speculator, pushing free-market principles to new limits (in his attack on the pound, for example)—it may strike some people as strange, he knows, to hear him inveigh against the laissez-faire policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. (Indeed, his fondness for what some in the Czech Republic view as excessive social engineering has led them to bandy it about that he is "a closet Communist.") He is a philanthropist of historic proportions and, now, a statesman in the making, but he is also a consummate gamesman, adept at finding tax loopholes and operating in gray areas where oversight is scant and maneuverability wide. Indeed, the sums that he managed *not* to pay the I.R.S. for many years put his present giving in a slightly different light. And the fact that he is perceived by many who have dealt with him as an autocratic master manipulator does, of course, make his spending many hundreds of millions of dollars to promote the cultivation of open society a heady paradox.

That such contrapuntal impulses and actions have been able to coexist within this larger-than-life individual is probably due, at least in part, to a well-developed talent for compartmentalization. Now, however, comes the rub. "See, as long as I was just a more or less anonymous player, certainly in the markets and also to a large extent in these countries, I could really do both things at the same time and they didn't connect," Soros told me. "They were in separate compartments. But now that I've gained such a high profile it becomes impossible to keep them separate."

Thus, his persona needs to embody the powerfully diverse elements of his life. Nearly lifelong duality, then, is to give way to integration?

"That's right. Because there can't be two George Soroses, right?" he exclaimed, with some merriment. "There can only be one, right?"

MOST of the instincts that Soros brings to his current incarnation—one in which he sometimes refers to himself as "a stateless statesman"—were developed in the course of his nearly forty-year career in the financial markets. If one looks back at that span, it seems evident that Soros is one of those people fortunate enough to have found a customized niche in life—a place so tailored to their proportions that their strengths are exploited to the fullest, their weaknesses matter little, and their idiosyncrasies seem to conspire for their success. In Soros's case, however, the niche was never wholly satisfying. He always considered his vocation somewhat beneath him, and he behaved in a way that suggested that he was cut from finer cloth than his fellows in the financial markets; indeed, when he opened his own offices, he chose Columbus Circle, as far from Wall Street as he could get. Byron Wien, an investment strategist who has known Soros since the sixties, told me, "George was an aggressive money manager, but he had a certain European elegance. He was *very* hungry and *very* aggressive—but he didn't *seem* it. He seemed classier than that."

Perhaps it was his ambivalence that prevented him from becoming an immediate success. After graduating from the London School of Economics, in 1952, he got off to an indifferent start. He arrived in this country in 1956, and, working as a stockbroker, moved from one Wall Street firm to another over the next decade. During this period, he was also writing—and endlessly rewriting—a philosophical essay, entitled "The Burden of Consciousness," that dealt with open and closed societies. "I was living in this other place, so those were kind of lost years, in a way, because very little happened that registered," Soros told me. But by the time he started Quantum, in 1969—having raised four million dollars from wealthy private investors—he was fully engaged, and he set about creating what would become the most aggressive, high-profile, and successful hedge fund in the world.

Although hedge funds became a fad in the nineties, in the seventies Quantum was a rare breed. At a time when most of Wall Street was focussed on the domestic market, Soros was investing globally. Leverage was always his enhancer. And eventually he began using the exotic combinations of maneuvers—trading futures and options, or derivatives—which many years later would become popularized as the "macro" approach to investing. Quantum was from the start an offshore fund (based in the Netherlands Antilles), and therefore open only to non-United States citizens and residents (Soros managed to make himself an exception), and investors' profits were not taxed until the money was repatriated. These tax-free profits were allowed to compound, year after year, and, as the fund manager, Soros claimed an annual fee of fifteen per cent of profits. In the early years, he took much of his fee in shares in the fund, and he and his family came to own about a third of it. (Today, the fund and its diversified offshoots have assets of roughly eleven billion dollars.)

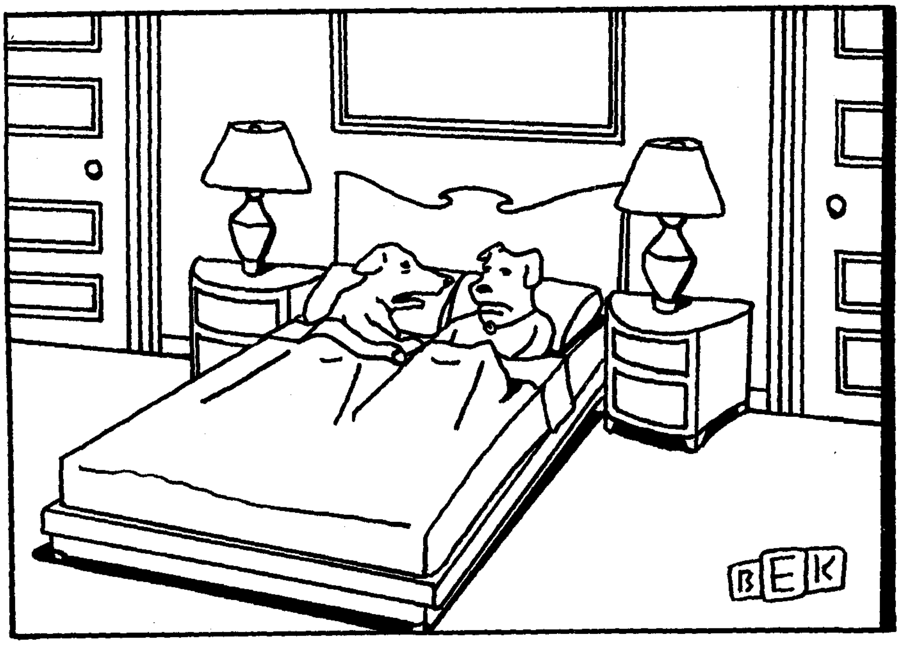
Thus his stake was always the biggest,

and his attitude, by and large, was that of an owner, not a manager. He did as he pleased; his control was unquestioned. Quantum did have a board of directors, which Soros could not join, because he was an American citizen, but it did not matter. "The directors have no authority; they're there as a formality," says Edgar Astaire, who, after many years as a director, recently resigned to join the Quantum operation. "All the authority is George's." A current member of the board offered a similar assessment, commenting, "Under Netherlands law, the directors have less authority than the doorman."

Regulatory oversight was also scant. As an offshore fund, Quantum was free of virtually all the regulations that apply to a United States public investment company, although it was still subject to certain United States laws with respect to trading activities. It operated in an extremely unregulated environment, and within that environment, many former employees say, Soros gravitated to areas—like currency trading—where oversight was even more minimal. As one expressed it, "George has his own rules—they're different, larger. He is unencumbered."

In 1986, Soros was fined seventy-five thousand dollars by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, for having held positions in excess of speculative limits. (He had distributed them among various private accounts.) And in 1979 Soros had signed a consent decree (in which one neither admits nor denies guilt) in United States District Court, in a Securities and Exchange Commission case involving stock manipulation. The complaint charged that Soros had accumulated more than fifty-four thousand shares of stock in a company called Computer Sciences Corporation in the month before a planned public offering; and, in the days just prior to the offering, sold the stock aggressively. The complaint stated that Soros's actions, which induced others to sell as well and drove the price down, caused the offering price of the shares to be lowered; and he had then proceeded to buy shares, at the artificially low price.

Markets did not always move at Soros's behest. In 1981, he suffered a major loss in the British gilt, or long-term government-bond, market. (That is the only year so far in which Quantum has had a negative return.) One friend, recalling Soros's description of the episode, told me, "He had cornered the market for British gilts. He was betting on the bonds' rising, and he was coining money. He was buying bigger at each step up. It kept going up. But then it started to turn. So, George told me, 'I took a big breath and went into the market and bought *really* big.' But it didn't work. He had a huge loss." This person added that, in his view, Soros's remarkable career in the financial markets has not sated his "long quest for legitimacy . . . because George knows that in the financial world many will say that his success is due more to his aggressive positioning and muscling of markets than to any thoughtful insights."



"Since we're both being honest, I should tell you I have fleas."

Soros's voraciousness in the market is triggered by what others see as an almost preternatural conviction. And it seems odd, at first, that this certainty should be the hallmark of someone whose investing is, he insists, guided by a theory based on the inherent imperfection of human perception. Soros calls his theory "reflexivity" ("It sounds like relativity," he once said), and he wrote an abstruse book about its relationship to his investing, "The Alchemy of Finance," published in 1987. He confesses, however, to being "hung up" about the fact that reflexivity has not received a serious reception, and he now maintains that he failed to articulate it properly. "I wrote a book about it, and it was basically just one idea—I mean, one sentence: 'Our inherently imperfect understanding helps shape the reality in which we live.' "

Soros believes that the error inherent in human perception affects events, which in turn affect perception (establishing, therefore, a circle of causation, or reflexivity), and so he subjects his own reasoning to a relentless critical process. And he believes that his greatest strength—what truly sets him apart from others—"is that I recognize my mistakes more quickly." Others may cling to their convictions, even as the market flouts them; but Soros, many attest, will turn on a dime. Jack Moorman, a trader who worked for Soros for a couple of years, told me, "No one can size up a situation as quickly as George. It's breathtaking. He has such certainty—not that he's right but that he knows what to look for to see if he's wrong."

"George believes that his gift on this earth is that he can take very complex situations and reduce them to their simplest form," said another person who worked for Soros for a couple of years. As for Soros's strength of conviction, his theory notwithstanding, this person said, "He does have this idea that we are all part of this imperfect circle. But he thinks he can take himself *outside*—that he can come closer to that perfect condition."

The investment process, of course, involves information as well as analysis; and Soros's access to information has long been the talk—and the envy—of many of his fellow-traders. A former associate recalled an episode in the early seventies which involved Quantum's portfolio of Japanese stocks. "I used to trade it at home, until about 2 A.M.," the associate said. "One night, at midnight, George called me and said, 'Sell the Japanese portfolio.' I said, 'There are only two hours of trading left—sell the whole portfolio?' 'The whole portfolio.' "

Soros was in Washington, D.C., when he called, this person continued, and in the next two days the United States government put restrictions on trading with Japan. "George is a terrific intelligence officer," this person added.

Over the past thirty years, Soros has developed a worldwide network of contacts, one that he is in a unique position to harvest today. "His network *is* amazing," Astaire asserts, adding that it includes a host of foreign ministers and central bankers. "And he works at it all the time." Soros further expanded his access to information by farming out money, to be handled by promising fund managers all over the world, who then became his sources. And he made the discovery of "emerging markets" a staple of his investing before the term had even been coined. Upon learning from his sources that liberalizing measures to open a country to foreign investment were being planned, Soros would set up a joint venture with a native there which could trade in the local market; when the market opened, his investments would increase dramatically in value.

What Soros excelled at, essentially, was identifying those lacunae where perception lagged behind reality, leaving room for exploitation. "A lot of people who invest get terribly excited," he once told me. "I was always detached—and that enabled me . . . to study the game as a game. I was particularly focussing on changes in the rules of the game, not in playing by one particular set of rules but understanding when new rules came into being—and learning that before others did."

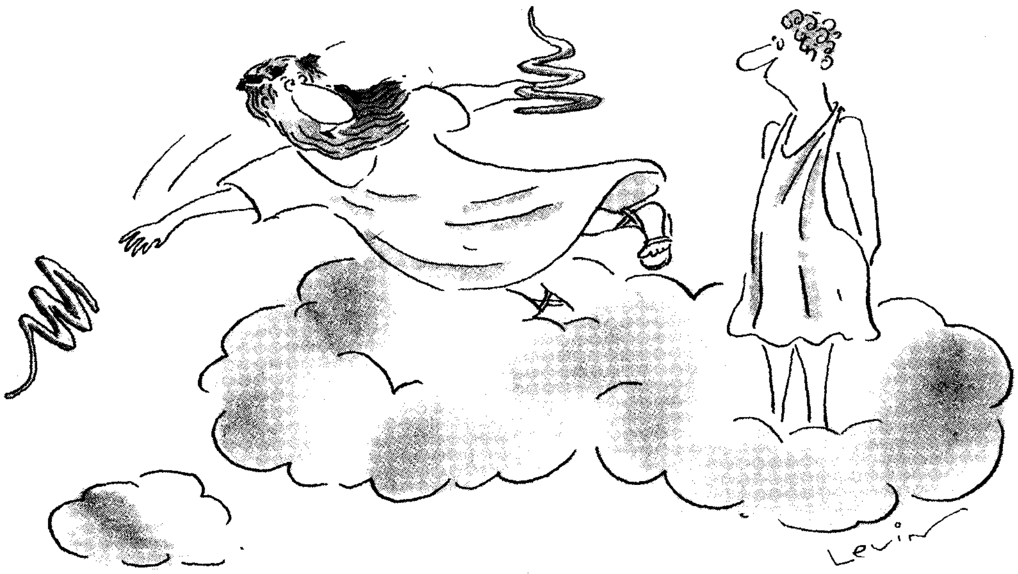
For nearly thirty years, Soros's investing—both in form and in content—was ahead of the game. It depended on information but also, to a great degree, on a certain mind-set (powered by both intuition and a superlative analytical capacity) and on a process of trial and error—a continuous playing out of his preoccupation with the relationship between participant and observer. It was a way of life that was, by all accounts, consuming, largely devoid of emotion, and almost completely self-enclosed. But Soros thrived. And the areas in which he had long been lacking—personal and professional relationships, judgments about character and motivation, all that derived from instinctual life experience—did not interfere with his success. Peter Rona, who is the head of the First Hungary investment fund, in which a Quantum fund owns a stake, and who has known Soros for about fifteen years, told me, "George has a very abstract mind—to the point that he is almost dehumanized. The higher the level of abstraction you're dealing with, the better George gets; the more you're dealing with something about which no scientific hypothesis can be formed, no general laws applied, the worse he gets."

Rona continued, "The excellence of his judgments about markets exceeds by a comfortable margin his judgments about people." And he added that this was part of the reason that Soros "has never made money by discovering the company that became a great success but, rather, by discovering markets—which are not personal."

Byron Wien told me that Soros "tends to think of himself in the third person," and went on to say, "He wants to achieve certain objectives—he gets his satisfaction from that, not from human relationships." He added, "George has transactional relationships. People get something from him, he from them."

Nowhere was this rather mechanistic approach more vivid than in Soros's relationships with his employees. Legions of traders passed through the revolving door of Quantum; some are said to have lasted only a day, others a week. Some who weren't fired quit, because, although they were well compensated, they decided that the experience was too punishing. Soros was expert at targeting people's weaknesses—scathing in his sarcasm and eager to stir internecine rivalries as a means of augmenting his control. (Once, when he had just hired a group of six money managers, he is said to have summoned them all into his office and announced, "Gentlemen, in one year there will be five of you. Now leave.") A former employee told me that he has concluded that Soros has "a horror of intimacy." He said, "George spends most of his energy with other people pushing them away, including insultingly. . . . You'd put your heart into something and George, in front of everybody, would say, 'I'm shorting it.' It was rude, brutal—he was in your face all the time."

In conversations with me, Soros alluded to his relationships at Quantum as another illustration of the detachment that has so dominated his life. "There was



"Paloma designed these especially for me."

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always a considerable distance between me and my being a fund manager," he told me. "And, for instance, I just didn't mix my personal life with my business life. Even people that I would have liked as people, I did *not* enjoy in private life, because I had a business relationship, and because interests would then come in. I would have to watch what I say, I would have to censor myself, so it interfered with my freedom."

He went on to say that he realized this was "very different from how most people do business," because "they build it on relationships. I had relationships which were correct—but not invested with emotion."

Even for those who feel they have positive relationships with Soros, the limitations on those relationships—what Wien referred to as their "transactional" nature—are always evident. Peter Rona emphasized that Soros has always treated him as a friend, and yet "it is hard to consider myself a 'friend,' " he said, echoing what various other Soros associates had told me. "If you're with him, you're under considerable pressure to perform. You have to come up with great ideas, have to say interesting things, have to be functioning at such a high level, in a way not congenial to ninety-nine per cent of humanity. He is racing along, he knows what your next sentence is, and he doesn't want to hear it." (Rona, moreover, is hardly possessed of a pedestrian intellect himself; a Hungarian refugee who knew no English when he arrived in this country, at fifteen, he went on to take high academic honors at Oxford.)

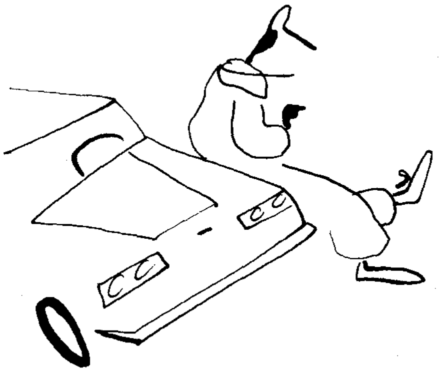
In conducting these fast-paced information-gathering exercises, Soros misses more than just the ordinary human pleasure derived from a genuine exchange. "He is not a person of balanced skepticism, who wants to hear all points of view and wants to ponder what is being said," Rona said. "He wants to get to a point: relevant or not relevant. You're O.K. or you're not."

In the early eighties, Soros paused. Events had occurred that were profoundly unsettling to him: his junior partner at Quantum, Jim Rogers, left amid fierce acrimony; Soros's marriage, to Annaliese Witschak, broke up; he was having problems with his three children; and his fund was down 22.9 per cent for 1981. His experience with the gilt market, moreover, had been traumatic. (Soros told me that he felt "very exposed," and added, "There was a particular moment when I was under tremendous pressure, and I thought I would have a heart attack—and I thought, This isn't worth it!") Two of his friends told me that this was the only period when they had ever seen Soros decidedly not in control, and quite vulnerable. Many of his longtime investors, worried about his emotional state, were considering withdrawing their funds from Quantum. Soros went to several of them and told them that he might in fact *not* be in a condition to be managing their money, and perhaps they should withdraw; some did, and this caused the situation at the fund to deteriorate further. One investor who attended the 1982 Quantum shareholders' meeting recalled, "He was tarnished goods. People were saying he'd lost it."

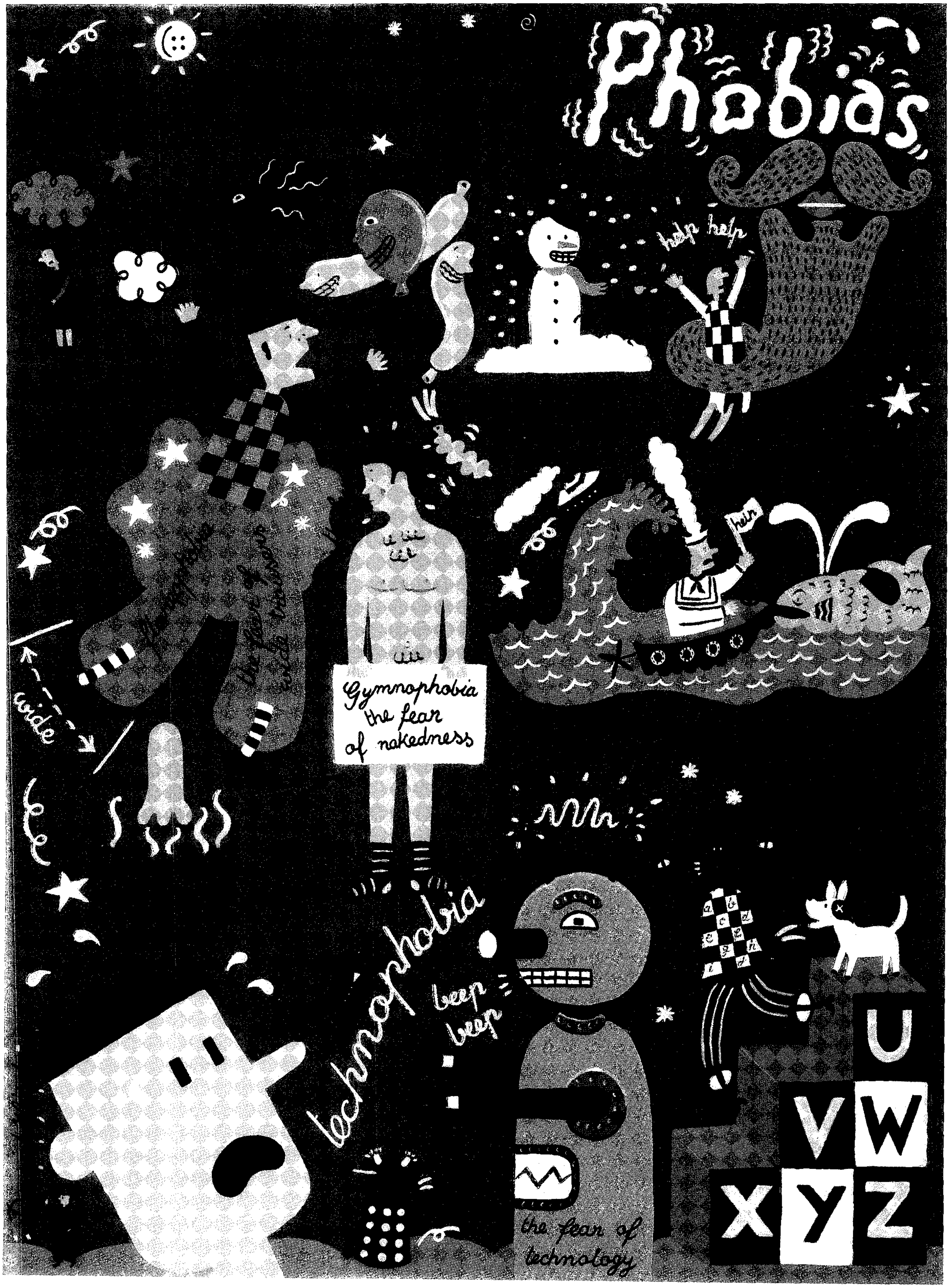
But Soros is nothing if not resilient. He hired some new traders for Quantum. He was seeing Susan Weber, an art historian twenty-five years his junior, whom he subsequently married. Furthermore, he decided at that time to do something that would add a new dimension to his life and, several associates say, perhaps attain the immortality he had long desired.

He had harbored messianic illusions—what he describes as a sense of himself as superhuman—since childhood. Soros is not reticent about this aspect of his personality. "It was a bit of a guilty secret until I became successful, because it was incongruous—this little schnook in New York!" he exclaimed. The role that he set about crafting for himself in Central and Eastern Europe provided ample outlet for such urges. Soros said to me, "God in the Old Testament has a number of attributes, you know. Like invisible—I was pretty invisible. Benevolent—I was pretty benevolent. All-seeing—I tried to be all-seeing!" Then, laughing, he said, "So I was playing it out."

It is not surprising that for his first foundation, established in 1984, Soros chose his native Hungary—the setting for halcyon childhood memories, violently truncated. Whatever the emotional content of his decision, however, it also reflected an attitude carried over from his business life, regarding leverage and identifying vacuums—places where he could get in early, before everyone else. His brother, Paul, who arrived in this country several years before George, and built a successful engineering firm, recalls their conversations about this new endeavor: "Up until that point, George wanted to be financially successful. But then it was 'O.K., you have made a hundred million dollars in one year, now what do you do?' And instead of donating five million dollars to a hospital, five million dollars to a university—the conventional way—he felt you could get much more bang for the buck by trying to do things to foster an open society in these countries. To try to do things here takes much more money, and the possibility of having an impact is much more limited. But there it was a vacuum. He could have so much more impact. Five or ten million dollars in Hungary under the Communists meant a lifeline for many people."



The appeal of starting these "open society" foundations (Hungary was followed by China, in 1986; the Soviet Union, in 1987; and Poland, in 1988) seems plain. But even here, creating a role that finally corresponded more closely with his self-image, Soros was not unconflicted. Over the years, starting with his experience in wartime Hungary, he had developed all the instincts of an outsider; he was distrustful of government, disdainful of the establishment, allergic to institutions generally. Traditional foundations did not escape his contempt. He saw them as too bureaucratic to respond in a timely way to real need; laden with overhead, which benefitted the givers instead of the recipients; and inherently corrupting, almost *demanding* to be exploited. ("They go against human nature," Soros says, "which is to take and not to give.") This last point was particularly nettlesome for him, inasmuch as he is a singularly untrusting person, intent on not allowing others to take advantage of him. (Indeed, Soros is said to have presented his wife, Susan, with a prenuptial agreement. And, according to one longtime friend, the investment adviser Victor Niederhoffer, when, at Soros's wedding, the minister recited the traditional vow for Soros to repeat—"For bet-


Phobias
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ter or worse, I do endow thee with all my worldly goods"—Soros turned to his personal attorney, William Zabel, and asked, wryly, whether he could state this without being bound, and, upon being told that he could, nonetheless muttered in Hungarian, "Subject to any prior agreements with my heirs.")

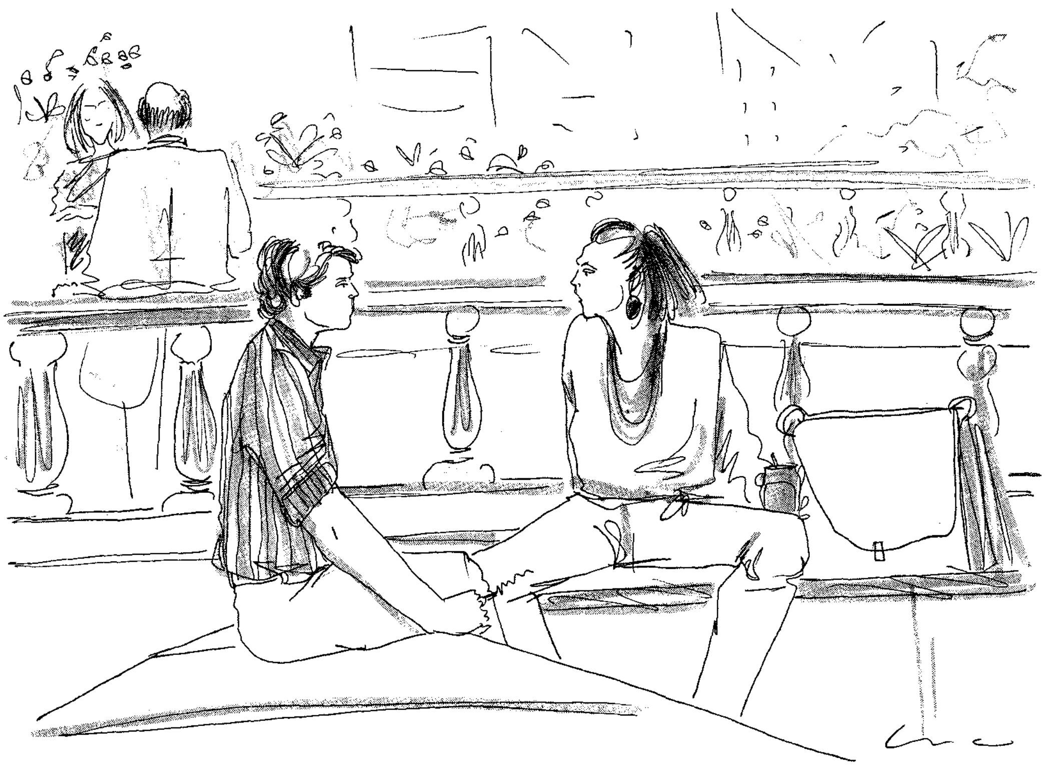
In an attempt to cure the flaws that he considered intrinsic to foundations, Soros made a number of decisions. His foundations would be short-lived, and thus deprived of the chance to spawn layers of bureaucracy. They would be operated with minimal overhead. Whereas the Ford Foundation might typically devote three to five years to spadework, along with grant-making, before opening a local office in a country, Soros foundations would open virtually overnight. And while Ford, again, would send its own people to run the office along with local people, a Soros foundation would be run only by local people—who would be given a considerable amount of autonomy, and who would, Soros reasoned, come to feel that it was *their* foundation, and so be disinclined to exploit it. He felt that it was critical for him to maintain a low profile, and keep his ego out of it—and, he says, he resolved to do so.

Between 1984 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soros foundations hit their stride. The money spent was modest by the standards that Soros has set for himself more recently; in those years, he spent less than thirty million dollars. But his foundations did help to drive wedges into closed societies. In Hungary, for example, the foundation provided photocopy machines to public libraries and institutions, established scholarships and travel grants for writers and social scientists, and funded myriad projects that were not state-controlled—theatres, filmmaking, sociological research, newspapers, and magazines. Referring to this broad range of activities, György Jaksity, an analyst at Concorde Securities, in Budapest, told me, "It's a phenomenon; it has an impact on everyday living. . . . The first book on business that I read that was written not from a Marxist but from a free-market standpoint said, 'Sponsored by the Soros Foundation.' . . . People like me know that the book they are reading, the teacher who teaches them, were sponsored by Soros. It's a very cultured way of influencing people. You can say, 'I'm Napoleon Bonaparte—I will kill thousands of people unless you give me Moscow.' Or there's the other way: the Soros way."

In this early period, especially, Soros was heavily involved in the work of the foundations. Colleagues recall the evident pleasure he took in reviewing hundreds of grant applications and, when he visited a region, in sitting around kitchen tables with local dissidents, discussing politics far into the night. While it was true that the foundations' directors had a great deal of latitude and that each foundation had its own board of directors, ultimate control resided with Soros. (For many years, the board of the Open Society Fund—an umbrella organization—consisted only of Soros, his wife, and Bill Zabel.) He was a benevolent autocrat, however, and he stuck to his resolution to maintain a low profile.

It was not really feasible to do otherwise. As Soros pointed out to me, the foundations were subversive, and their real motivation had to be "under wraps"—particularly since the different countries in which they existed were in different stages of political evolution. Recalling that an article that appeared about him in the late eighties referred to him as an "anti-Communist," Soros said, "It was highly embarrassing and damaging to me, because I had a foundation in China, where I said I was a supporter of the Open Door policy. 'I'm not an anti-Communist,' I said to them. So you would have to say different things in different countries." As a result, he went on, "all communications had to be private—I would talk to the government officials, and say one thing in one country, and another thing in another country!" He laughed heartily.

With the collapse of Communism, everything changed. In his life as a speculator, times of crisis—which Soros refers to in his theory of reflexivity as "far from equilibrium conditions" (borrowing the term from chaos theory)—have generally afforded him his greatest opportunities and rewards. Soros believes that, in part because of his early "far from equilibrium" experience under the Nazis, he has an edge at such times. Now, applying his theoretical perspective to events in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, he saw another such crisis unfolding, and he was convinced that he had a superior grasp of what needed to be done. He would assume the role of deus ex



"I'd like to be respected for my mind, but I'll settle for clothes."

machina, as he said, and begin providing the kind of assistance necessary to these countries to counter a rising nationalism; he thought that he would be a market leader, in effect, as he had been so many times in the financial markets; the West would follow him. This was when he began his quest for public attention. He also began establishing new foundations at a furious pace in the formerly Communist countries—sixteen between 1990 and 1992. The regimes in some of these countries were still blatantly repressive, and the foundations' role was not very different from that of the earlier, pre-1989 foundations. But in other places the difference was night and day. Whereas in the past Soros's strategy in these closed societies had been to nurture the weak and subvert the powerful, now everything was up for grabs. Soros could, in some instances, perhaps help decide who would *be* the powerful—and he could shape these emerging societies not from the bottom but from the top.

Victoria Roberts

"Whatever you do, please don't edit yourself."

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NOWHERE has Soros put more energy and money into bolstering a government than in Macedonia. "George is the savior of Macedonia," his friend Morton Abramowitz declared. And the Macedonian representative in Washington, Ljubica Acevska, says of two separate Soros loans of twenty-five million dollars, "People have found it difficult to believe. The opposition said, 'A *country* does not help you—why would an individual help you?' Remember, twenty-five million dollars in Macedonia is like billions here. . . . The fact that Soros did it helped the government a great deal."

By betting aggressively on Macedonia, Soros plunged into one of those simmering Balkan disputes whose apparent simplicities mask lethal complexities. The Macedonia that excited Soros was a province of Yugoslavia once known as Vardar Banovina; it was renamed the Republic of Macedonia in 1945 by Marshal Tito. Its populace was varied, the largest portion being Slavs, whose ancestors had arrived in the region nearly a thousand years after the most famous Macedonians of all, Philip II and his son, Alexander the Great. However, Tito—coveting the large Greek region of Macedonia—encouraged the irredentist idea of all Macedonians' sharing a distinct ethnic identity. He then supported the Communist-led Democratic Army in the Greek Civil War, a brutal conflict that tore the country from 1946 to 1949.

Greece's fears were reawakened in 1991, when the fragment of Yugoslavia declared its independence as the nation of Macedonia; its newly elected President, Kiro Gligorov, was one of Tito's Communist bosses, and had helped propagate the idea of a separate ethnic identity for Macedonians. Gligorov says that his Macedonia has no territorial ambitions, but the Greeks have not been comforted. In 1992 and 1993, Gligorov's government issued new school textbooks that showed "geographical ethnic boundaries" encompassing the whole of Greek Macedonia; the country's flag carries the symbol of the empire of Alexander the Great; and a preamble to its 1991 Constitution pledges it to protect Macedonians everywhere. The Greeks do not pretend that the Lilliputian Macedonia, with its two million people, poses any threat to them at the moment, but history has taught them to take a long view. In a scenario that some Greeks project, for example, Macedonians might someday attempt a hostile incursion, in concert with their fellow-Slavs in Bulgaria, which occupied part of Greece during the Second World War.

This was the situation when Soros arrived in Skopje, the Macedonian capital, in September, 1992, during a whirlwind tour through his proliferating foundation network. He had come directly from Bulgaria, where a member of the board of his foundation in Sofia had given him the prevailing Bulgarian view: that there is no such thing as an ethnic Macedonian, and that Macedonia's fervent attempts to establish this identity cloaked irredentist aspirations bequeathed by Tito. "Soros knew nothing about Macedonia," Acevska said. "When he arrived, his head was filled with propaganda from Bulgaria—he was probably sorry that he was here. Then he had a meeting with the Prime Minister, whom Soros really likes, and the President had a lunch for him—and he changed his mind."

That afternoon, Soros held a press conference at which he announced that he was committing an additional million dollars to the budget of his foundation in

Macedonia, and, furthermore—and this carried as much weight—he was changing its name from the Open Society Foundation of Skopje to the Open Society Foundation of Macedonia.

When I described Soros's overnight conversion to the Macedonian cause to someone who used to work for Soros in the financial markets, this person asserted that it was “pure Soros.” He said, “As a fund manager, you're looking at life and then simplifying it in order to find predictive qualities. So he gets the ‘broker's recommendation’—that is, the consensus view—from Bulgaria. Then he gets to Macedonia, and, instead of getting corroboration, he decides that the reality is totally different. And he thinks, If I *hit* the reality hard, the illusion will give way. It's his *perfect* market position!” This person noted that Soros is always happiest going against the herd: “That's when the wind's in your hair.”

He pointed out, however, that in the market “you see if you're right or wrong; the market tells you. Now George is in an area where there is no real right or wrong, where it's more nuanced. He says, ‘If I spend enough, I will make it right.’ ”

In the good-guy, bad-guy formulation to which Soros is so partial, the Greeks became the bad guys. He did not go to Greece to get the Greek view. In his few hours with Gligorov, he became persuaded, as he has often insisted since, that Macedonia is the only multi-ethnic state left in the Balkans with a government devoted to pluralism and democratic principles—a view contested by many ethnic Albanians, Macedonia's largest minority, who charge that Gligorov's actions belie his words, and that they are discriminated against in schooling, employment, and political representation.

The executive director of the Soros foundation in Skopje, Vladimir Milčin, maintains that he, too, is committed to the principles of an open society. But it is difficult to reconcile a dedication to pluralism with the demagogic passion that Milčin exhibits on the question of Macedonian ethnic identity. He gave me propagandist literature on Macedonia and Greece (including a pamphlet of excerpted texts entitled “Modern Greeks Are Not Descended from the Ancient Hellenes”). Efforts to resolve the ongoing dispute with Greece have included discussions about changing the name of Macedonia to something like Vardar Macedonia or Nova Macedonia. But in an interview I had with the Prime Minister, Branko Crvenovski, which Milčin attended, the two men insisted that the name is not negotiable. Milčin declared, “If they change the name, I will go to the mountains and fight with the guerrillas!”

Such strong partisanship is not the normal language of foundations. As tax-exempt organizations that receive tax-deductible contributions (from Soros), the Soros foundations, according to I.R.S. rules, are not supposed to engage in most forms of political activity. They may not lend support to a particular party or a campaign, for example, and they may not lobby (though “lobbying” is rather loosely defined). Soros, as he has done often in his financial life, is moving aggressively in a gray area—in both his personal lobbying and the work of his foundations. Soros has made no secret of his willingness to lend support to Gligorov, even in the context of an election campaign. In November, Gligorov and his coalition won an ample majority (in an election that the two main opposition parties have charged was rigged). About a month before the election, Soros told me that he would have gone to Macedonia to help Gligorov if the election had seemed in doubt. Ljupčo Georgievski, the right-wing head of the opposition V.M.R.O. (International Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) Party, charges that the Soros foundation is “a support machine to the government.” Virtually all foundation grants, he says, go to those associated in some way with the ruling party. Referring to a television station, A1, that receives Soros support, Georgievski said, “It is truly an alternative in its cultural programming; however, in politics . . . you see ministers of the present Macedonian government more often than on state TV.” Marshall Harris, who was formerly in the State Department and is now the executive director of the Action Council for Peace in the Balkans (an organization started in 1993 with Soros's funding), told me, “The complaints I've heard a lot—that the [Gligorov] government freezes out all other parties, even those in its own coalition, that information about negotiations [in the dispute with Greece] is kept under *very* tight control—are not suggestive of a new system.”

Since the fall of 1992, Soros has been lobbying aggressively for United States recognition of Macedonia, while Greece has been making the case that recognition should not come before Macedonian concessions on its name, its flag, and its Constitution. Last February, President Clinton did agree to recognize Macedonia under the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia—an attempt not to show prejudice to either side. Greece retaliated with an embargo, and Clinton, after meeting with representatives of a Greek-American lobby, essentially froze the recognition.

At this point, one well-placed person in the Clinton Administration told me, Soros moved into high gear. “He wrote a sharp letter to the President, raising parallels with 1938 and appeasement,” this person said. Soros also wrote a somewhat more moderate piece for the Op-Ed page of the *Times*. In public appearances, he denounced Greece and the Greek-American lobby. He has lobbied Strobe Talbott and others in the State Department and the National Security Council. And at the Bretton Woods Conference in Washington last July, Soros worked the corridors assiduously, attempting to persuade members of the European Union to help Macedonia. (Greece, which then held the chairmanship of the E.U., has vetoed any aid.)

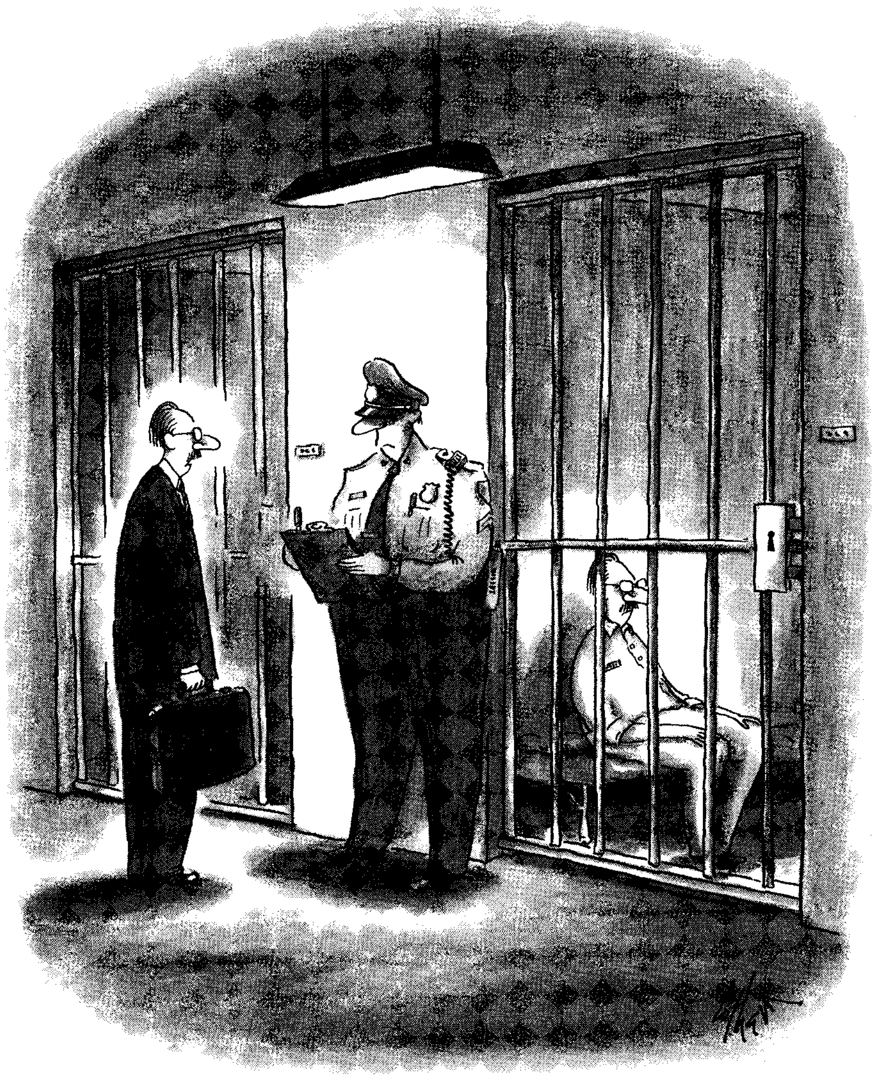
Nor were all Soros's efforts so overt. The Soros-funded Action Council for Peace in the Balkans launched a major effort on Macedonia. In February, 1994, it issued a “Macedonian White Paper,” highly supportive of Macedonia's position vis-à-vis Greece, and this was circulated to the White House, Cabinet offices, Congress, and hundreds of media people. Several months later, in May, it issued another report, which also supported Macedonia. The report had been produced, according to its cover letter, by “a bipartisan, independent delegation.”

The Action Council letterhead lists fifty people—including members of its steering committee and its executive director and its program director—but not Soros. (According to Aryeh Neier, Soros wants to “foster the debate” rather than “be identified with detailed positions.”) Nor, for that matter, does it list John Fox, who is the head of Soros's Washington office, and who, according to Marshall Harris, “was director of the policy group . . . the behind-the-scenes group at the working level of the council," and was involved in the preparation of both reports.

Few would disagree with the high premium Soros has placed on achieving a stable Macedonia. For if tensions were to ignite between its Slav majority and its large Albanian minority, that conflict might well precipitate a wider Balkan war—one that could involve Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece. And his denunciations of the Greek embargo are not so off the mark, either; even many who understand Greece's sensitivity on the Macedonian issue acknowledge that Greece, in imposing the embargo, has handled the situation in an unjustifiable as well as a self-damaging way.

But the problem with Soros is the extremity of his views—his tendency to beatify one side and demonize the other—and the way in which that is reflected in his activism. If Soros had pursued a more moderate, conventionally diplomatic course at the start, listening to both sides, it is just conceivable that he—with his influence and resources—might have been able to mediate a settlement before the issue became so enmeshed in the politics of both countries. In the event, however, Soros's intervention—as self-styled deus ex machina—has done nothing to move the conflict toward resolution; if anything, one might argue that his zealousness (and funds) has contributed to Macedonia's intractability. According to one person familiar with the situation, the Greeks have become somewhat more flexible, while Gligorov—after his recent electoral victory—has stiffened. It bears noting, too, that Soros's strength has always been abstraction, while his weakness has been judgments about character, motivation, the more nuanced stuff of life—and, for that matter, of politics. As one person with considerable diplomatic experience told me, "Gligorov is very smart, but he did spend thirty-five years in the Tito government—and to have survived in that system you have to be a tough bastard. We should not have illusions about him. Soros does romanticize Gligorov.

"Soros sees this situation in black-and-white," this person continued. "But in my view, no. In this region, there is no black-and-white, and it is a mistake to view it that way."



"I'm his biological lawyer."

To Soros fans like Strobe Talbott; Leslie Gelb, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations; and Mark Malloch Brown, the head of public affairs at the World Bank, Soros is the trailblazer they hope other businesspeople will follow, moving to fill the vacuum left by an over-extended and inadequate government. But Soros's Macedonian expedition seems to be almost a parable about the pitfalls of that idea. Soros, unsurprisingly, is to a considerable degree a creature of his experience in the markets: idiosyncratic, intuitive, prone to quick judgments often based on scanty information, aggressive, manipulative, so self-reliant that he trusts no one's judgment but his own—a profile, in sum, hardly suggestive of a diplomat. And, unlike the governmental bodies he has long disdained, Soros is a free agent, accountable to no one, subject to no checks and balances of countervailing opinion—whose power is rooted, in the end, not in a consensus on the wisdom and sophistication of his world view but in his money.

Of all the countries where Soros has placed his philanthropic bets since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Ukraine seems on the verge of producing the greatest payoff. There, more than anywhere else, Soros has been able to exert influence at the highest levels of the government to see his ideas implemented. Indeed, if President Leonid Kuchma succeeds in bringing about the economic reforms he has recently promised, that over-all scenario will have been scripted, to a notable degree, by Soros.

It began back in the fall of 1991, when Ukraine declared its independence, and Soros had what he calls a "seminal meeting" with Dr. Bohdan Hawrylyshyn, an internationally known Ukrainian economist, who, after living abroad for many years, had decided to return to Ukraine in 1988, to help steer its course, and in 1990 had become chairman of the new Soros foundation there. The foundation started out with the usual Soros mandate, to foster civil society mainly through the support of cultural and educational activities. But, with Ukraine's declaration of independence, Soros recalls, he and Hawrylyshyn decided on a far more ambitious role for the foundation: it would build the institutions that would enable Ukraine to function as an independent and democratic state. Because of its years as part of the U.S.S.R., Ukraine had none of those institutions in place. "It was a vacuum," Soros told me, and so "there was a great willingness to accept this kind of support, which would in normal times be rather intrusive." He added, laughing, "I mean, I can't try to do that in America. They would tell me where to get off!"

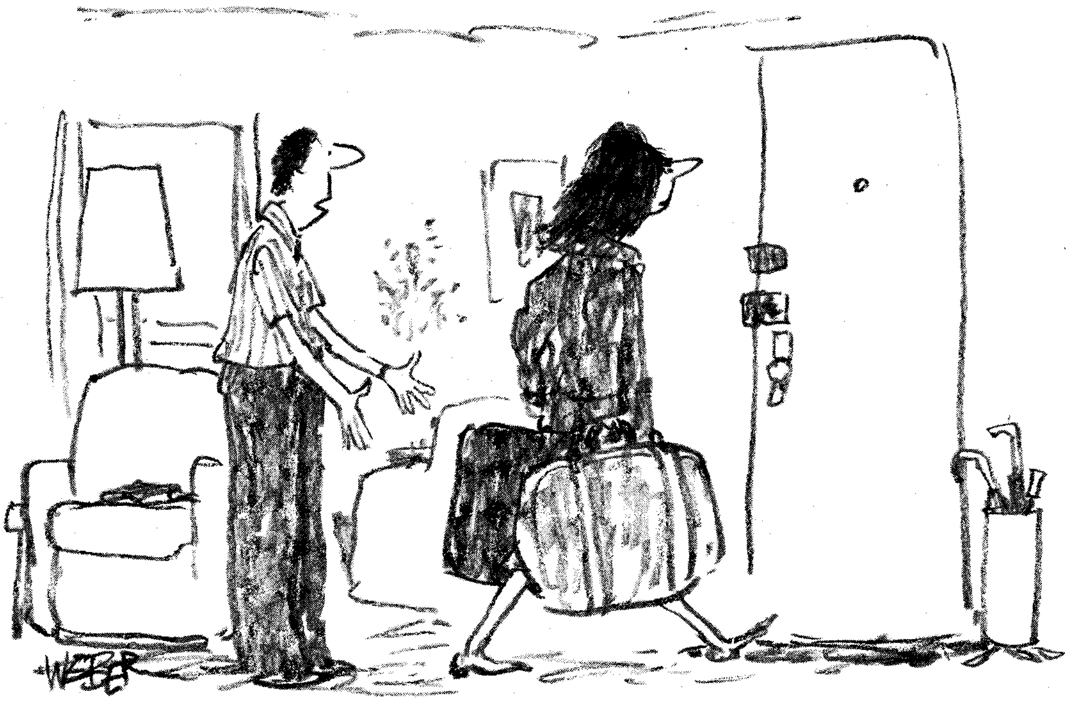
Bohdan Krawchenko, a Ukrainian-Canadian historian who returned to Ukraine in 1991 and was recruited by Hawrylyshyn and Soros to work for the foundation, stressed that, however primitive Ukraine may appear to a newcomer today, it was far more barren in 1991. Krawchenko said, "When we first started coming here, three and a half years ago, I remember George saying to me, 'This is a banana republic without the bananas!' "

Contrasting the Soros foundation in Ukraine with its counterparts in other countries, Krawchenko told me, "There is no other place where the Soros foundation is so plugged in at the top. We were here when there was *nothing*. . . . The deputy minister of finance sat with George and me in a basement almost four years ago and we tried to figure out what to do about monetary reform." That deputy minister of finance, Olech Havrylyshyn (a nephew of Bohdan), was on the payroll of the Soros foundation—as was the deputy governor of the National Bank (George Yurchyshyn, a Ukrainian-American who had previously been a vice-president at the Bank of Boston).

Despite the fact that Soros had placed his own agents in key positions, he was still not able to move Ukraine according to his design. The President at the time, Leonid Kravchuk, was unwilling to pursue the kinds of free-market reforms that Soros and his allies were advocating. Soros became so frustrated, Bohdan Hawrylyshyn recalls, that back in early 1993 he even talked about giving up. It happened that around that time Soros named a new executive director of his foundation, Bohdan Budzan, who had spent years as a bureaucrat in the Communist regime. And if any individual symbolizes Soros's present determination to make things happen in a country by dealing at the top—and doing so in whatever ways are most effective—it is Budzan, who is so much the stereotype of a Party commissar that he seems a caricature. One person who has dealt extensively with Budzan and the foundation told me, "George saw him as a guy who could get things done, a guy from the old regime—who but an old Party hack, in this society, at this time? Budzan is a press-down, chain-of-command kind of guy."

Last May, Leonid Kuchma came to the United States and paid Soros a visit. He was at that time a candidate for President. Soros was so excited by his conversation with Kuchma that he called Hawrylyshyn, in Bucharest, and put Kuchma on the phone to relay the outcome of their meeting. Kuchma was rated an outsider in a large field of candidates, but in early July he won an upset victory. Soros says that he had nothing to do with it. However, Evelyn Herfkens, of the World Bank, says, "The Bank cannot support election campaigns of reformers; in the Ukraine, Soros did." There was, at the least, a massive effort to level the playing field: the April, 1994, bulletin of the Soros foundation lists twelve grants, in the areas of civil society, education, economics, and mass media, eleven of them for amounts ranging from five thousand dollars to thirty-one thousand eight hundred dollars, with most in the lower range. But the twelfth—to support independent television stations' coverage of the Ukrainian elections—was for $363,100, an extraordinary infusion of capital in Ukraine, and one that would be spent in a three-month period.

What Soros undoubtedly did do was enable the successful Kuchma to win for Ukraine a commitment for a crucial, I.M.F.-administered loan program of nearly four billion dollars. The loan had been strongly recommended by the United States at a Group of Seven economics meeting just before Kuchma's victory, but it was contingent on Ukraine's instituting economic reforms. An economic observer sent by



"You can't leave. Your role in this relationship is pivotal."

the United States, Professor Rudiger Dornbusch, of M.I.T., returned with a report that said, in Soros's words, "This was not the moment, and this was not the group."

Soros was galvanized. He got in touch with Anders Åslund, of the Carnegie Institute, who has worked on economic reform in Russia, and asked him to come with him and John Fox to Ukraine. They arrived about ten days after Dornbusch had returned to the United States. After meeting with President Kuchma, Soros directed Åslund to organize a team to work with the Ukrainians on their negotiations with the I.M.F. And he fired off a memo, distributed to the White House, the Treasury, the State Department, the I.M.F., and the World Bank, in which he argued that this *was* the moment, and this *was* the group. He and Dornbusch agreed on the bleak economic realities of Ukraine, but they differed, essentially, on their reading of Kuchma. Soros asserted that Kuchma did indeed intend to pursue those reforms necessary to get the aid.

On September 24th, about six weeks after Soros mobilized his forces, it was reported in the Ukrainian press that Ukraine and the I.M.F. had reached agreement to begin implementing the first stages of the four-billion-dollar program. (And by the end of the year roughly seven hundred million dollars had been received.) It was a considerable triumph; in the view of Thomas Simons, the New Independent States coördinator, that agreement would not have been reached if Soros had not intervened and provided Kuchma with the Åslund team—a team unaffiliated with any government or institution. "They were not World Bank, not I.M.F., not these financial institutions," Simons said. "They were from George Soros, and they were working for *him*"—that is, for Kuchma. "They were absolutely indispensable." Since then, a great deal has happened to ratify and extend that agreement, with the United States taking the lead, and in these activities Soros has played no substantive part. But, as Simons said, "he was the trigger."

The day the agreement was announced, Soros was attending a conference in Kiev sponsored by the American-Ukrainian Advisory Committee, a group organized by Zbigniew Brzezinski; Henry Kissinger was there as well. Soros, in brief remarks to the group, evinced no lack of certainty. Noting that Dornbusch, a "highly respected economist," had returned to the United States with an extremely negative report, Soros declared, "I contradicted him firmly. I was right, and he was wrong."

That may prove to be true if Ukraine continues to pursue its reformist course. By late November, however, President Kuchma had begun to encounter stiffening opposition. Moreover, in fairness to Dornbusch, it seems virtually impossible that, in a short visit to Ukraine, he could possibly have appreciated the extent of the infrastructure that Soros had built, and the degree to which all these organizational investments now seemed to be maturing.

Roman Shpek, the Minister of the Economy, who is leading the reforms, is a graduate of Soros's Management Training Institute. The Institute for Public Administration, which Krawchenko heads, has also produced significant players; as Krawchenko told me, "of the four hundred or so in the Cabinet apparatus, about thirty have been through our program—and they are quite an activist group." Soros's Center for Privatization and Private Investments has taken many members of Parliament on trips abroad, to see economic reforms at work in formerly Communist countries; most recently, a group of very conservative members went to Prague—shortly before the confirmation vote on the proposed head of the State Property Fund (in charge of privatization), Yuri Yehanurov, a reformer favored by Soros and his allies. At least half the people in the delegation changed their minds, according to Krawchenko, and Yehanurov was confirmed. And during Soros's late-September visit a task force—including people from the World Bank, the Ukrainian government, and the Soros foundation—was created to wage a media campaign for the reforms. One person who attended this task-force meeting said that Soros's message was "Work together! Move! Economic education is the thing to do until you hear from me again!"

Against the profound bleakness of the Ukrainian backdrop—markets offering fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat where, by and large, only foreigners can afford to shop; professional people holding menial

PSALM 103 & VANITY

"The LORD is full of compassion
and mercy, long suffering
and of great goodness."
Why aren't YOU?

The littlest thing overthrows you
into bad feeling in the
worst way. In THE worst way,
or one of them,

as in a dream
a black-brown cancer became
a 3-inch block, without *your*
having noticed, until too late.

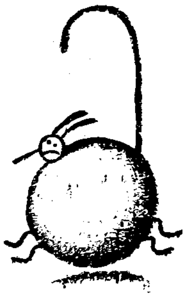
Why won't you take steps to guard
the lightness of heart
that comes from trying to SEE straight;
or to make amends, even late.

The railroad bridges' stone
is ALLOWED to be overgrown.
Is clearing away the ivy
(maintenance!) vanity?

—Elizabeth Macklin

jobs and living in painfully reduced circumstances; the decrepit nature of state-owned office buildings, with dimly lit warrens of corridors and stinking lavatories; the prevalence of the Mafia in everyday life (the best hotel in Kiev, the National, where Soros always stays, is under heavy guard)—Soros seems to radiate plenitude and power. And, as he swept through Ukraine during his September visit, which lasted five days, his persona appeared to take on new dimensions by the moment. He was the general marshalling his troops; the benefactor dispensing largesse; the proud paterfamilias surveying his foundation ("This is a prototype of an open society!"); the celebrity surrounded by the awestruck seeking a smile, a handshake, a few words of recognition; the political boss before whom all became, to a greater or lesser degree, abject.

That he, a foreigner, has been able to stride so purposefully across the political landscape of this country is probably due to a number of factors, among them his having arrived so early in its independence, and stayed; his partnership with Hawrylyshyn, who is widely admired, and trusted for his patriotism; and the good will generated by the many programs that the foundation supports in the areas of education, culture, and health (as well as its more politically charged agendas). Still, it was not until *his* man became President that Soros was able to begin effectively mobilizing for the kind of change that he and others in the West had long envisioned. Dr. Viktor Pynzenyk, the Deputy Prime Minister, told me, regarding the team of foreign advisers led by Anders Aslund, "We know very well what needs to be done. But Kuchma respects Soros, and Kuchma needs to be convinced by memos prepared by Soros."



Soros makes no bones about the interventionist nature of his role in Ukraine. At one point, he remarked, jocularly, "If this isn't meddling in the affairs of a foreign nation, I don't know what is!" And he told me that he saw an exact parallel between the "self-fulfilling prophecies" of his financial life and those of this political realm. Describing an episode in the seventies, when he wrote a report on real-estate-investment trusts (REITs), in which he predicted their rise and subsequent fall in the market, and went on to fuel both that rise and that fall with his aggressive buying and selling, Soros commented, "I look at Ukraine with the same frame of mind as I look at REITs. . . . By my intervention, I make it happen!"

SOROS'S determination when he created his foundations to keep his ego out of them has now changed. As he has transformed himself into a celebrity, his foundations have become his personal platform and vehicle—and at least one of the foundations, in Moscow, has been plagued by corruption. In the most recent imbroglio at the Moscow foundation, last spring, it emerged that employees had lent foundation monies to a car dealership in exchange for more than sixty cars, several of which the employees took for their own; computers and other goods that were supposed to be distributed had been stockpiled in a warehouse; and roughly fourteen million dollars, which was supposed to have been spent on programs, instead had been deposited in banks of such poor reputation that those deposits raised the question, at least, of kickbacks.

While the abuse in Moscow is probably the most egregious, some Soros-foundation employees worry about what they see as a more general loss of innocence—one that reflects Soros's own metamorphosis, and his liaisons with those in power. A longtime Soros associate told me, "When we had to deal with dictatorships, we were very pure and straightforward. But when dealing with nice guys you make a deal. George believes that if you want to change a country that's what you do."

The critical question, this person said, is "what it means to be an independent foundation when our work depends so much on whether George sleeps or doesn't sleep with the President of a country." Because Soros "sleeps with Gligorov, my colleagues in Skopje have a completely different working style than Sonja Licht's, in Belgrade." Licht is the president of the board of the Belgrade foundation, which is repeatedly threatened with being closed down by the government of Slobodan Milošević. By contrast, this person said, the Macedonian foundation is widely reputed within the foundation network to receive special treatment, "because it is really a government office."

In this person's view, the case of Albania nicely poses the dilemma about the foundations' proper role. Soros has cultivated a relationship with Albania's President, Sali Berisha. When the director of Soros's foundation in Tirana began to challenge some of Berisha's policies, Soros fired him. But Soros has been disappointed with Berisha, who has displayed the very totalitarian tendencies that Soros, as a champion of an open society, should most condemn; during Berisha's Presidency, a severely restrictive press law has been passed, journalists who have written stories critical of the government have been jailed, and members of the country's Greek minority have been discriminated against. Most recently, five leaders of Albania's ethnic-Greek community were convicted on espionage charges in a political show trial—a trial that was condemned by observers from several foreign human-rights groups for its flagrant violations of due process.

Regarding his experience in Albania, Soros comments, "We helped him"—Berisha—"in the elections, we were quite active in that . . . and then partly, of course, Berisha was not what he was cracked up to be, and partly my man didn't build the foundation right." Given Soros's instinct for personal detraction, his statements about Berisha have been oddly muted. But one may attribute that to his interest in continuing the collaboration; for, while the Soros foundation in Albania has accomplished little, it is at present embarking on an ambitious project to rebuild schools and reform the educational system.

The longtime Soros associate said, "You can make a very clean Albanian institution, with Albanian people . . . avoid corruption, and have it support civil society. And you will have a nice, clean institution, but nothing moves. Or, you make believe you are the same, and you corrupt everybody. You get things moving, schools will be rebuilt, you will have curriculum reform." Corruption, this person said, would likely include everything from the most blatant (kickbacks from those who are given a deal) to the somewhat more subtle (demands for perks, such as trips to the West, from government officials whose approval is required for the reforms). "For me, it is very difficult to run foundations with links to the government. But maybe I am too conservative and slow, still following old recipes. He"—Soros—"feels it's a way of buying the government."

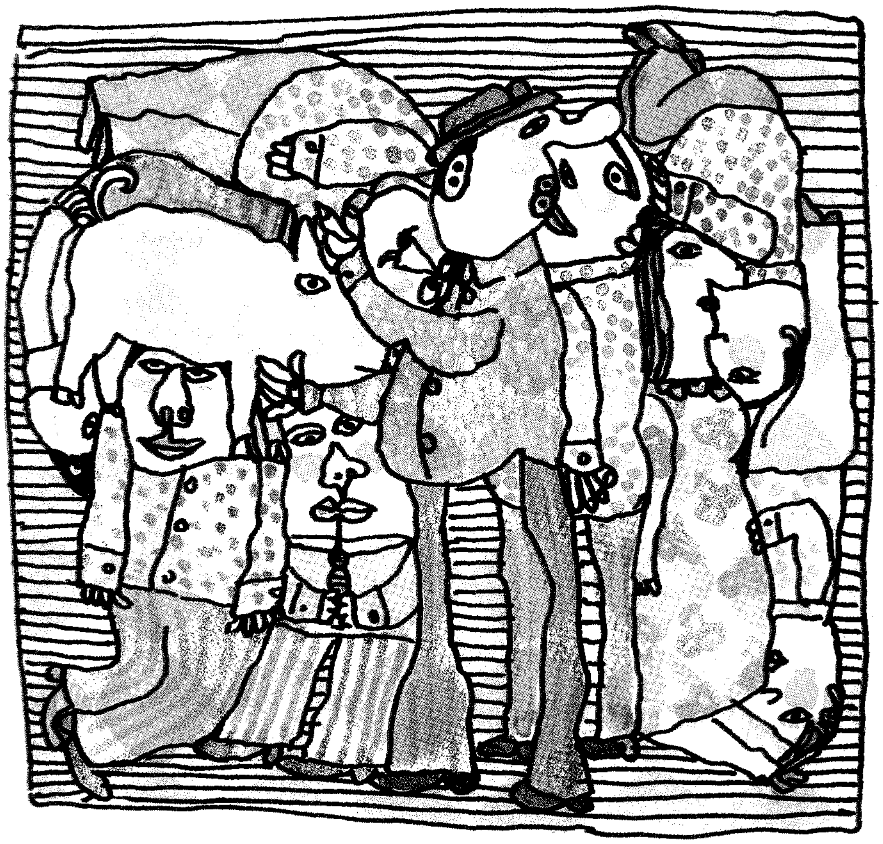
This changed role of the foundations is most troubling, of course, to those old-timers who remember what it was like before. But other issues, too—all related to Soros's ever-expanding ambit—have contributed to increasing anxiety among the people who work for the foundations. The broadcast stations of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty continue to be funded by the United States government, but in early 1994 Soros entered a joint venture to acquire the organization's research institute and, under a fifty-year lease, its archives. Both operations are now subsumed under a new entity, the Open Media Research Institute (OMRI). Based in Prague, it has a seven-member board: Soros and two others from his staff; two people from the Board for International Broadcasting (the government agency that oversees Radio Free Europe); and two "independents" (one chosen by Soros and one by the B.I.B.). It should be noted that if the independents were to side with their selectors, the lineup would, predictably, be 4–3, Soros.

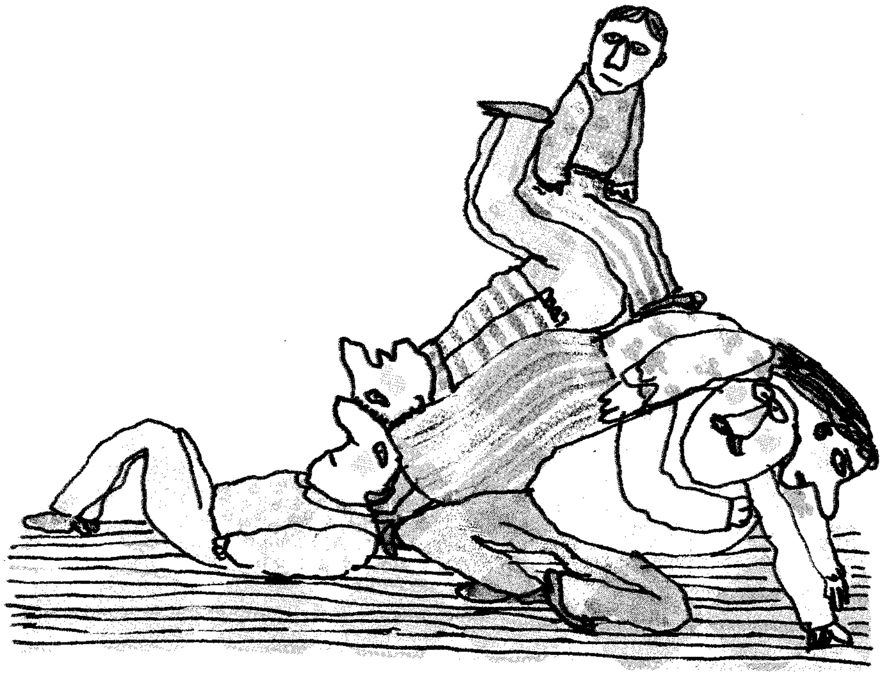
At first, Soros was attracted primarily by the archives—a vast repository of information on the history of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union during the Communist epoch—as a valuable asset for his Central European University (C.E.U.). According to Alfred Stepan, the president of the C.E.U., however, it was when Soros realized that he could also acquire an information network—the institute, whose daily and weekly news analyses of the region are extremely influential and are currently distributed mainly to government officials and academics—that he became really excited. The institute is being reorganized, Stepan says, with a large-scale change in staff, and the plan is to increase the publications' circulation—for the weekly newsletter, a hundredfold. One way of achieving that will be to disseminate the publications through the foundation network, in twenty-four countries.

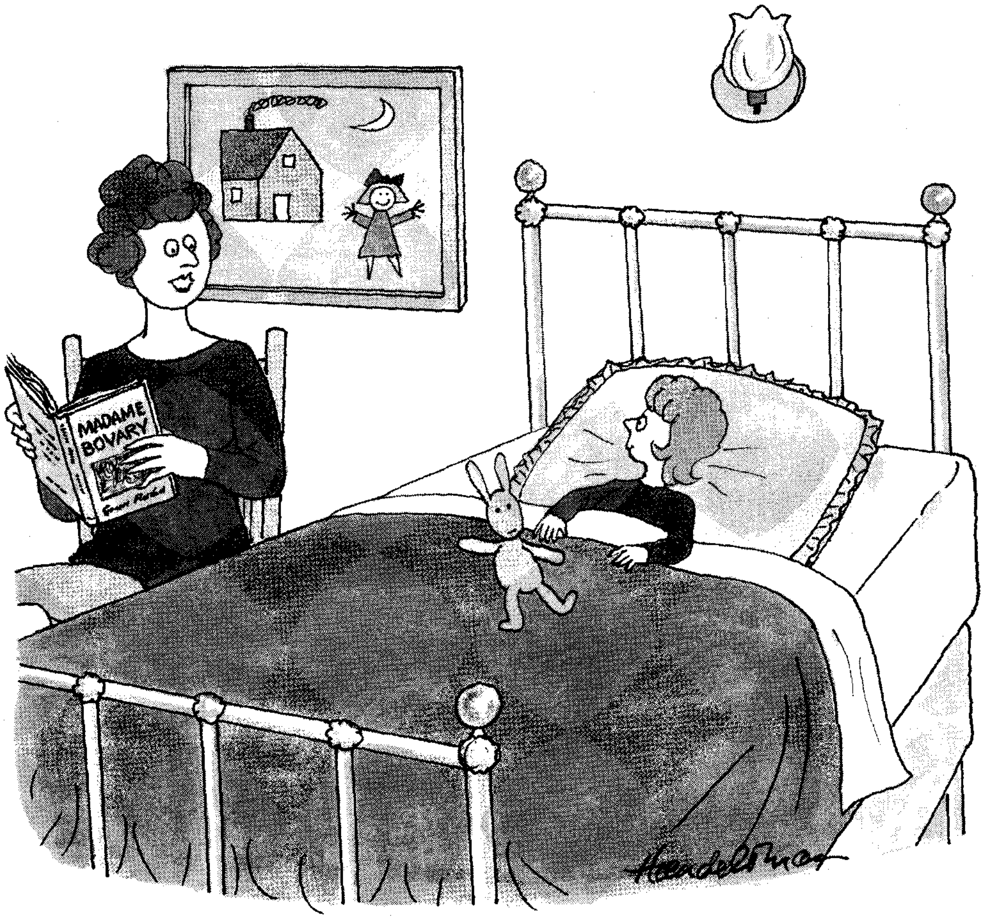
When Soros's deal with Radio Free Europe was announced to dozens of foundation employees, at a meeting in Budapest in the spring of 1994, many were dismayed. "What we essentially said was 'You do what you want, but don't involve us!' " one employee recalled. Even in countries where the governments are friendly, the foundations have to contend with opposition parties decrying Soros as a greedy capitalist bent on expanding his

ACCOMMODATIONS

BY WILLIAM STEIG







"The surprising thing is that Flaubert, who was a man, actually got it."

empire—and, employees point out, his control of a vast information network would lend credence to that image. Several told me they find it particularly ironic that they should have spent most of their lives under Communist regimes and have finally emerged as open-society partisans—only to be confronted with such a directive. "If this media program has to distribute someone else's truth, it will be a disaster," one employee commented.

At the Budapest meeting, Soros also said that he was renouncing his much trumpeted policy of not investing in countries where he had foundations. In the past, he had said that he was abstaining from such investments because of the inherent conflict of interest; as a large-scale philanthropist and, in some places, an adviser to the government, he would be in a position to exploit a host of opportunities. Now, in Budapest, he explained that these countries needed foreign investment, and that other investors would follow his lead. Many in the audience felt that this sudden reversal would, like the Radio Free Europe deal, make their tasks on the ground more difficult; when critics charged that Soros's philanthropy was merely a smoke screen for empire-building, there had been an effective rebuttal. Disapproval was not unanimous, however; Budzan, of the Ukrainian foundation, for one, applauded Soros's decision, saying he hoped that Soros would invest in Ukraine. (Soros recently decided to make Ukraine an exception and not to invest there, because of the intensity of his high-level involvement.)

What people who work for Soros plainly find most unsettling is the fact that he has decided to distance himself from his foundations—to turn them over, in large part, to a group of managers so bureaucratic in their approach that one foundation employee likened the process to "a corporate takeover." Miklós Vásárhelyi, the director of the Hungarian foundation since its inception, said to me, "I am anguished by this creation of bureaucracy." Sonja Licht, too, said many fear that their foundations will lose the spontaneity and responsiveness that distinguish them from more traditional foundations—that "we will no longer be what we are."

It is difficult to generalize about what they are, now that there are so many of them, operating under diverse conditions. But it is true that when Soros conceived of them they were to be anti-foundations: lean, unbureaucratic, ad-hoc, entrepreneurial—even, as Soros said to me approvingly, "chaotic." And, whatever the shortcomings of this system, it suited Soros perfectly. Here, as in his financial life, he ruled in a state of utter hegemony for years—with no independent board, and virtually no experienced professionals. One person who has worked for Soros's foundations told me, "George always wants personal control. We'd start a board meeting, George would walk in, give his latest agenda, sometimes contradicting, and leave—and then we'd have to try to pick up."

The unstructured nature of authority spawned constant maneuvering to bring decisions to Soros. "The name of the game in the foundation is access to George," this person continued. "I was often reminded of the Russian czars before the Revolution—all the rules in the empire didn't mean anything if you could get the czar to sign a decree." The competition for Soros's attention led to a great deal of rivalry, which (as had been true at Quantum for many years) must have pleased Soros at some level, because it enhanced his control; this person recalled Soros's having commented, regarding his encouragement of rivalry between two fairly close associates, "I never stand on one leg."

But with the proliferation of foundations in the last few years and the huge sums of money being funnelled through them (roughly three hundred million dollars a year), Soros came to feel that he had created a monster, one that was in fact not within his control. "I made all the decisions, and nobody knew what the decisions were," he told me. "People turned up and claimed that I'd authorized this or that, and for all I knew, I did!" It also seems plain, however, that the haphazard, crazy-quilt system suited him when he wanted to spend all his time enmeshed in it, working its many threads. But he has done that—and for Soros that which has been done soon loses its charge. With statesmanship beckoning, the foundations' demands have become burdensome. Finally, Soros had intended his foundations to be short-lived connectives between closed and open societies, but these transitions, he acknowledges, have turned out to be much slower and more uncertain than he anticipated.

Thus Soros—the iconoclast who so abhors institutions that he often seems bent on subverting his own—has decreed that his foundation network be thoroughly institutionalized. Under the aegis of Aryeh Neier, the staff at the foundation headquarters, in New York, has grown from thirty-five to a hundred and ten, with an influx of new administrative executives, financial people, and a general counsel. At a meeting in Budapest in October, Soros told a distraught group of foundation officers from the former Yugoslavia, "I still don't have consolidated accounts of what I am spending, where—so I am still groping in the dark. But I feel I am going to get this figure soon. I know that there is a lot of worry in the foundations about loss of autonomy, and centralization." Then he added, "The foundations have to change their way of operations. Each one will be different. We are not running McDonald's. Open Society is a different story."

Soros continued, "I will not be as involved as I've been. I think I peaked, I went over the top—and there are only twenty-four hours in the day. I want to push myself up, so I deal only at the highest level of abstraction."

Vladimir Milčin, from Macedonia, spoke up. "How much of your personal presence can we hope for?"

"I just answered that," Soros responded, sharply. "I have to husband my energies."

SOROS, it is plain, is moving on. His life has been an arduous process of extension and reëxtension, of goals attained and surpassed, his efforts fuelled by a titanic will to win but also by an insatiable appetite for new territory to conquer—and at the moment there is no end in sight. While the foundations have been concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, there is now a foundation in South Africa, yet another in Haiti, a project in Burma, and several programs in the United States, where he now intends to focus more of his energies and funds. He recently sought to acquire a major stake in the largest retail bank in Hungary, on behalf of his foundation and university there, but negotiations were halted, partly because of public protest over his proposition: an initial investment of fifty million dollars (scaling up to two hundred million), which would have made indomitable a bank that already controls two-thirds of the retail market. ("It *is* the market," the analyst György Jaksity commented.) Soros has been a big believer in the Internet; and, as the C.E.U.'s Stepan explained to me, the OMRI news reports will eventually be distributed on the Internet, thus establishing an information system that will probably be impregnable. "In the hypothesis that things got very bad in Russia and TASS controlled everything," Stepan said, "we could get information to a thousand people in a way that would be difficult to block."

What makes Soros's relentless expansionism appear so unthreatening, especially in the West, is that it appears so benevolent. It seems almost silly, if not wrongheaded, to worry about abuse of power by the self-proclaimed avatar of open society. That he is creating an information network that will reach not only the hundreds of foreign-policy experts who currently depend upon it but thousands of people in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union hardly seems a concern—despite Soros's proved tendency to support various governments in ways that are not always overt—because it is being done in the name of keeping access to information open to all. That he has used his money to set up an organization that does not bear his name on its letterhead, and that produces a purportedly "independent" report on the dispute between Macedonia and Greece, might not be viewed negatively in Washington these days—where Macedonia is generally seen as the underdog, and Soros as its well-meaning champion. That he has installed his own paid representatives in the government of Ukraine—and, in the words of a longtime associate, believes that you "buy" governments to get things done—might also, conceivably, be viewed as the minor indiscretion of an idiosyncratic but beneficent individual. Ambassador Simons said to me, in regard to Soros's unique brand of entrepreneurial diplomacy, "Of course he meddles—but he's a free citizen! It's not a problem—unless he did something diametrically opposed to our view, like supporting a Zhirinovsky. But he never would."

That Soros's intentions are good and his views simpatico, however, should not obscure the issue; just as we uphold the rights of those whose values we condemn, so, of course, should we scrutinize the exercise of power by one whose values we share. Scrutiny of Soros, however, is wanting. In his political activities, he does not really come under the direct purview

COASTAL

Cold April and the neighbor girl
—our plumber's daughter—
comes up the wet street

from the harbor carrying,
in a nest she's made
of her pink parka,

a loon. *It's so sick,*
she says when I ask.
Foolish kid,

does she think she can keep
this emissary of air?
Is it trust or illness

that allows the head
—sleek tulip—to bow
on its bent stem

across her arm?
Look at the steady,
quiet eye. She is carrying

the bird back from indifference,
from the coast
of whatever rearrangement

the elements intend,
and the loon allows her.
She is going to call

the Center for Coastal Studies,
and will swaddle the bird
in her petal-bright coat

until they come.
She cradles the wild form.
Stubborn girl.

—Mark Doty

of anyone; as usual, he is moving unconstrainedly in a gray area where rules are uncertain and shaded boundaries easily bypassed. His philanthropy, moreover, serves as a kind of amulet to ward off criticism; many who know him, particularly those in government, seem so mesmerized by the scope of his giving that they tend to put in abeyance the kinds of judgments that they might otherwise make.

As Soros seeks to enter the foreign-policy community, his largesse continues to pave the way. If history is any guide, however, these contributions will be strategic, with many strings attached; Stepan told me that when he was dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, he could not accept a million dollars that Soros had offered, because he could not meet the conditions that Soros was imposing. Soros has for many years been a major contributor to Helsinki Watch; and that, too, has been strategic, for by directing his monies toward designated projects he has been able to influence which situations receive attention (and, perhaps, which ones do not). According to one person, he recently made a long-term commitment to the Council on Foreign Relations—under the condition, however, that he be an anonymous donor. With the council, he co-sponsored a conference on NATO, held at the C.E.U. in Budapest in November of 1993, and delivered a paper he had written. Commenting on Soros's talk, one person told me, "A lot of people were sitting there shaking their heads—but he was paying the bills."

That these people may be more interested in his money than in his world view does not escape Soros, who has long accustomed himself to such "transactional relationships." Still, during one of our interviews, when we were flying from Kiev to Budapest in a small plane that he had chartered, he sounded almost wistful as he told me that he had congratulated Henry Kissinger on his recently published book, "Diplomacy," at a meeting of the American-Ukrainian Advisory Committee, and that he would have liked to engage Kissinger in a debate about Ukraine, because he considers him "really a worthy opponent." Soros then added, "But he doesn't want to fight with me."

Why was that?

"There is no payoff," Soros said, chuckling, "and there may be a payoff the other way! I would like a little debate, but he doesn't—so we are friends."

Of the scores of people I talked to, the only one who seemed to have any perspective on the issue of his philanthropy was Soros himself. "I know I'm not what I'm cracked up to be," he told me. "I'm not really as much of a philanthropist as the amount of money would suggest." He added, "It's only because I don't care about money that I give it away!" (Indeed, he often complains that he will not be able to give it all away before he dies, although he would like to—trusting no one else, naturally, to spend it as well as he would.)

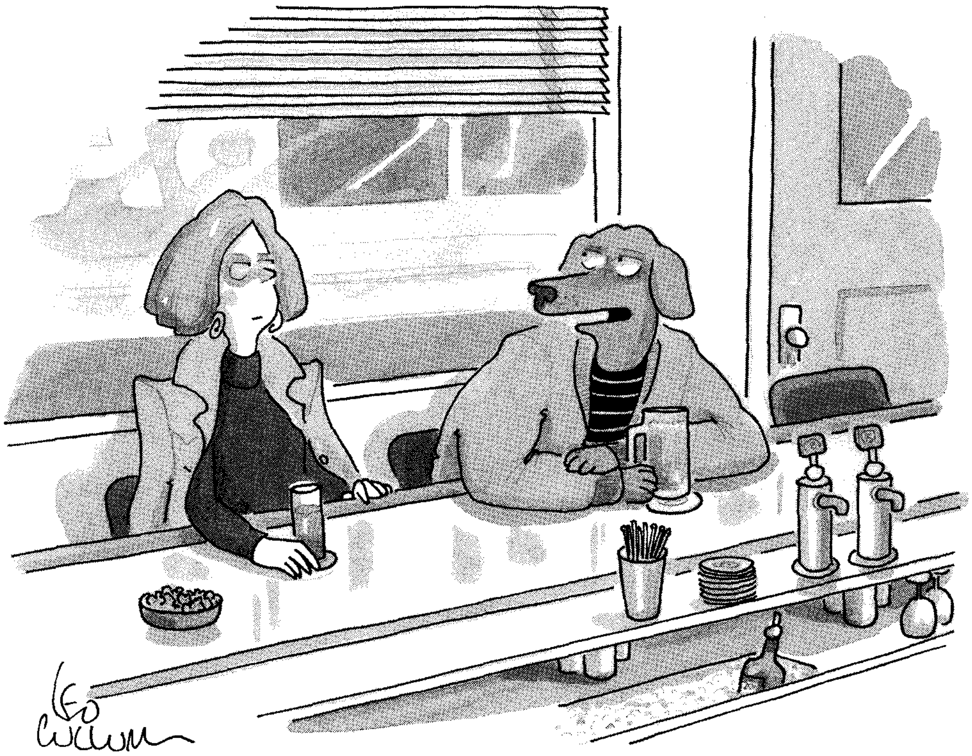
Soros seems to enjoy making such frank self-evaluations, and he insists that he subjects himself to the same relentless, unforgiving process that he does the rest of the world. Certainly it was true that in his years as a fund manager illusion was his prey, and he was an extraordinarily disciplined, indefatigable hunter. But Soros himself says that he spends as much as ninety per cent of his time away from the fund these days, and in doing so has surrendered the discipline that it demanded; thus it seems possible, at least, that he might fall prey to illusion himself. It is some misjudgment born of hubris—rather than any external force—that might halt his trajectory.

Some people in the financial world who have known Soros for many years observe his continuing political climb with misgivings. And they note, too, that Quantum is not flourishing. It had the second-worst year in its history in 1994, with a return of 2.9 per cent. (Of course, in the current financial environment that was something of an achievement.) The year 1994 was so punishing that several hedge funds were driven out of business, and there is increasing speculation that—as inevitably happens with financial fads and the glut of players they attract—such funds have run their course. This may well be why in the last couple of years Soros has been charting new directions for Quantum. For example, several offshoot funds are investing in real estate, and also in power plants and other infrastructure projects in developing countries. Some of Soros's longtime investors are skeptical about these new ventures, however, and Soros seems to share at least some of their doubts; last November, it turned out that he had terminated Quantum's participation in a United Kingdom realty fund.

Gilbert de Botton, the chairman of Global Asset Management (GAM), in London, who was one of Soros's earliest investors, decided not to invest in the new breed of funds. "It's not the name of his game, clearly," de Botton said. "It's as though you're running a candy store for years and then suddenly you're investing in government bonds."

But de Botton said that he remains confident in the main Quantum fund, in which GAM has a stake. When I asked him what he thought of Soros's public metamorphosis, de Botton replied, "If he were a chum, I'd have twenty-six opinions. But he's too precious a financial asset—so I deliberately avert my gaze." Pressed, he said, "There is a subtext here—the unspoken word in the room. Is this an incipient megalomania? And is it affecting his ability to make business decisions? And my answer to the second part of that question is no."

As for the political role that Soros has created for himself in countries like Ukraine, de Botton continued, "There is such a vacuum, isn't there? And in a time of crisis someone can emerge. As when a family is in crisis, and suddenly the chauffeur takes charge! But then the crisis passes, things go back to normal. I would expect that in some of these countries they will eventually say, 'We don't care how many billions this guy has, we don't want him telling us what to do.'"



"Yes, Doreen, I think I am capable of unconditional love."

• •

ULTIMATELY, what is so striking about Soros is the degree to which—no matter how one tries to focus one's lens—the twin images persist, resisting alignment, irreducible: the two George Soroses. It is not uncommon to find individuals who have constructed a persona at odds with who they really are, as evidenced by their actions; and it is even less uncommon to find individuals with markedly conflicting impulses, in whom, nonetheless, one side predominates. It is rare, however, to find someone in whom contradictory impulses are so extreme and so strong that the principle of cognitive dissonance seems not to apply—and who seems as a consequence to be pushed and pulled in restless, frenetic motion between these polar zones.

A person who has known Soros for many years says, "Messianic zeal often works as concealment for what one really craves—and it strikes me that the more George covets control the more hysterical he becomes about open society. But I don't think he recognizes this in himself. He is not a knowing charlatan. He is sincere."

If Soros were not sincere, surely he would seek to mask himself, cultivating a type of guardedness common among those far less powerful than he. But probably his most appealing—and disarming—trait is his unguardedness, manifested sometimes in a tendency to think aloud, as if he were trying ideas on for size, and sometimes in surprising (and even, on occasion, self-damaging) revelations. Soros is well aware of this trait, which he refers to as "this urge to reveal myself"; he told me that his brother first called it to his attention back in 1982, when Soros began telling his investors that he was in a state of some turmoil and that they ought to think twice about leaving their money with him. "My brother said, 'You are really stupid! Why are you doing this?'"

Why, indeed?

"Well, partly, of course, I think it's my self-involvement, because I do find myself rather fascinating. So there is a certain wanton element, and it is an indulgence." He went on, "And the other thing is that in my previous lives I always had to keep things secret, starting with having to live with a false identity. So to me it's the reward for success—that I don't need to hide."

Before I could ask for a further illustration, Soros said, "My lawyer, for instance, who set up the tax structure which effectively protected me from taxation for many years—until the loophole was finally plugged, and I became a fully taxpaying citizen—just couldn't understand why I should ever allow myself to be seen!"

The loophole to which Soros referred was closed with the passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1986. The act created something called a "passive foreign-investment company" (PFIC), and a new taxation regime, which took effect in 1987. When I asked Gary Gladstein, of Soros Fund Management, about what Soros had told me, he confirmed that taxes on his Quantum profits had been deferred until Soros sold his shares in the fund, which he rarely did. "So he had no taxes—he had a free ride," Gladstein said.

What was critical to the fact that Soros did not pay taxes on his income before PFIC was that he did not have a controlling interest in the fund—that is, he did not own more than fifty per cent. That is why the period in 1982, when shareholders were redeeming their shares in the fund and his ownership was therefore increasing (approaching the fifty-per-cent mark, according to one friend), was a truly perilous time for him, and why it was all the more remarkable that he should have

"New York is a place of free spirits."

gone to some shareholders and urged them to carefully consider whether or not to leave their funds with him. The law in those pre-PFIC years also attempted to penetrate arrangements designed to circumvent that voting-control test, and find those situations where an American shareholder might—despite not owning fifty per cent—be in control. Presumably, the fact that Soros was not even a director of Quantum would have helped his claim to the I.R.S. that Quantum was not "controlled" by him.

As it was, Soros's profits were compounded year after year, tax-free, from 1969 through 1986, and in those years the fund, of which Soros came to own roughly a third, grew from four million dollars to more than a billion and a half. Without what Soros refers to as "a clever tax thing," he would probably have had to pay at least a couple of hundred million dollars to the I.R.S.

And, as Gladstein also noted, the first years that Soros had to pay taxes, 1987 and 1988, were not very good years at Quantum. (The returns were 14.1 per cent and 10.1 per cent, respectively.) "It was in '89"—when the fund achieved a return of 31.6 per cent—"that his taxable income went up so much," Gladstein said. And it was also then that Soros's massive giving began. Soros now says that his aim is to give away fifty per cent of his income each year—the maximum amount that he is allowed to deduct.

Whether or not Soros has been able to bring a similar ingenuity to his nonprofit empire is an interesting question. Certainly in a country like Ukraine, his foundation is engaging in plainly political activities, although a reading of the foundation's annual report—which lists, as its major areas of support, education and research; civil-society programs; and culture, environment, and health—gives no such suggestion. In addition to political activity, another I.R.S. issue is control. An operating (as distinct from a grant-giving) foundation that conducts its own programs cannot be directly controlled by the donor; some of Soros's offshore foundations, therefore—such as the one in Ukraine—are constituted as legally noncontrolled entities, each with its own board of directors. But the idea that it is these local boards which have control—and not Soros—is as much a chimera as any notion that the Quantum board has control. Doubtless, the foundation boards have made decisions; but, as many people within the organization told me, there was no decision that Soros could not overturn, and in many instances the decisions emanated solely from him. Soros himself had told me, "I made all the decisions."

While Soros's more stunning revelations tend to be self-generated, there are few subjects from which, upon being questioned, he will shy away. The corruption in the Moscow-foundation office, for example, had been distressing to him, but he was not reticent when I asked about it. Discussing the deposit of fourteen million dollars in unreliable banks, he quickly assumed some responsibility, deriding "our stupidity in sending them five million dollars a month for a program without looking at how they were spending it." The foundation in Moscow had had a checkered history, Soros continued, "and finally we hit on this transformation program, which is a great success." The program, which was aimed at transforming the education system, was so successful, Soros said, that "I wanted to make it bigger. I threw a lot of money at it—and, in doing that, I destroyed it, effectively. Because it was too much money." This was a criticism I had often heard of the mega-grants that were made in the wake of the pound-sterling bonanza, but it was surprising to hear it as self-criticism. Those administering the funds apparently found themselves struggling to push vast sums of money through a hastily constructed, haphazard system, which could not possibly maximize the benefit. And in the one instance that came to light, of course—the fourteen million dollars in Moscow—the money was not being spent on the program at all.

The Moscow foundation is being reconstituted, with a new board and new executives. The search for board members has been launched in typical Soros fashion: twenty or so prospective candidates were taken on a quick tour, by chartered plane, of Soros foundations in Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Ukraine; they were in Kiev and Budapest during Soros's visits there, in September. Although nearly all the candidates appeared to be in their fifties and sixties, one Soros associate told me that it was like shepherding a group of schoolchildren; they seemed more interested in the next snack period than in the endless round of meetings arranged for them. A Russian candidate told me at the end of the trip, "There was too much information to absorb. But travelling around in our own plane—now, that was interesting!"

I told Soros that this did not seem like money well spent. He responded, rather sharply, "Look, how do you mobilize people? You ask for recommendations, and you look at them. . . . So I asked for recommendations, and I invited people, took them on the trip, and it turned out that they were all too old and too Jewish!" He chuckled. "And not acceptable. I mean, you can't be that Jewish in Russia. So I told them, 'You can't have more than one-third Jews on the board.' "

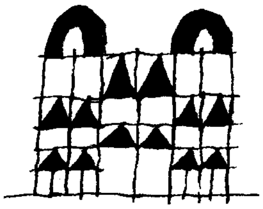
Soros does and says whatever he pleases; that license, in a life filled with the more prosaic trappings of wealth, has been perhaps his most prized luxury. He is notorious for making commitments and suddenly retreating, or forming relationships and then breaking them off—in a pattern that seems, in a way, to mimic his to-and-fro in the markets. In 1986, he joined the board of trustees for Columbia's School for International and Public Affairs and, almost immediately, resigned. (Stepan recalls that Soros told him after the first board meeting, "That was the most boring meeting I ever attended. I don't sit still for six hours for anything!") He founded the main campus of the C.E.U. in Prague, and then—in part after a new Czech government did not fulfill its predecessor's commitment about a building—he decided to house most of the university in Budapest. ("Who has ever heard of it, someone setting up an institution and then pulling out?" Soros demanded, seeming to relish his own temerity.) He cultivated a positive relationship with Václav Havel, the President of the Czech Republic and a former dissident whom he admired; but then, according to a person close to Havel, Soros became offended by what he felt to be a lack of attention, and their relations at present are "not cordial." ("From what I do know of Soros, it seems very difficult for him to recognize people as his equal—or even superior," this person commented. "He is so competitive. And when he is dealing with the President of a country there is the question of who matters more.")

He forswore investing as a matter of principle in countries where he was involved philanthropically, but now—abjuring prior declarations about principle which were, in fact, sound—he will invest. Soros has recently staked a claim of principle in another investment area, however. He says that he has withdrawn Quantum's funds from Peregrine Investments, a controversial Hong Kong merchant bank with large investments in Burma, a country ruled by one of the world's most repressive regimes (for which, in fact, Peregrine manages pension-fund monies)—and one where a Soros foundation is active. Quantum has had an equity holding in Peregrine for years; its chairman, Philip Tose, is a director of one Quantum fund and the manager of another. According to Gary Gladstein, it was only in September, 1994, when a highly critical article about Peregrine appeared in *The Economist*—which mentioned Soros's stake in Peregrine, and sent shock waves through the foundation—that Soros moved to distance himself from it.

In the world that Soros has created for himself, there is no one to call him to account. The unpredictability of his public statements is the bane of some of his associates; he is an almost reflexive provocateur, always needing to make an impact—with his words as well as with his money—and he gets involved in some very volatile situations. On occasion, his refusal to censor himself on matters involving Serbia, for example—he has made strong denunciations of Serbian leaders—has threatened the existence of his foundation in Belgrade, and even jeopardized its employees. Some members of the Soros foundations have been hoping that Aryeh Neier might exert a countervailing force. But it seems evident that if Neier—a sober and clearly dedicated man whose cubicle of an office at the Soros-foundations headquarters is dominated by a large portrait of Hannah Arendt—were to try to become the conscience of the foundations, his tenure would be short-lived. (Of the situation in Moscow, in which Neier enforced sterner disciplinary measures than Soros believed were necessary, Soros said to me, "I think it involved relatively minor infractions due to the lack of controls, as distinct from malfeasance, or criminal activities. But Aryeh is a very pure person," he continued, with a hint of acid, "so he can't stand a little bit of infraction, you see.")

For Soros, self-exposure is tantamount to sovereign privilege. "Publicity has become food and drink to him," one old friend remarked. That is perhaps not surprising, inasmuch as the publicity has been overwhelmingly positive, at least in the West. Soros has had only one damaging brush with the press—a trivial one, but one that he abhorred for that very reason. In 1990, Soros moved to London with his wife and two babies, in order to commute more easily to his foundations in Eastern Europe. About a year later, Susan Soros fired the butler for drinking the Soroses' champagne, and the incident was widely reported in the tabloids. (The butler subsequently sued for damages, and won.) According to Edgar Astaire, Susan Soros was so upset by the coverage, which she deemed unfair, that she wanted to move back to New York (they soon did); Soros is said to remain prickly on the subject to this day. Neier told me, in a more general context, "There are rich people who would like their luxurious life styles to be written about—but I can't imagine anything that George would loathe more."

Soros's appetite for more serious-minded exposure is probably not without its risks. In any event, he told me that he considers it quite dangerous, particularly now, as he stands on the threshold of the political world. Still, he yields to temptation. Pondering this, he offered yet another explanation. "I think the reason I am so interested in revealing myself is that I am trying to find out who I am," he said. "It's a process of self-*creation*, not just self-revelation." Soros repeated that, seeming to savor it, as he often does when an idea is especially pleasing to him. "I don't *know* who I am, and I am finding it out."



That desire for public display of the intensely personal was evident again in a speech that Soros made at Columbia University's College of Physicians & Surgeons, in late November. The occasion marked the inauguration of his newest project, Death in America, whose aim is to promote a better understanding of the experiences of dying and grief, and to transform the culture surrounding death. Soros said in the speech, "In America, the land of the perpetually young, growing older is an embarrassment, and dying is a failure." He has made an initial commitment of five million dollars a year for three years.

Addressing an audience of a couple of hundred people, mainly physicians, Soros began by saying there were two reasons that he had decided to sponsor this project, one abstract and the other very personal. The abstract, he said, derived from "a basic insight which has been at the root of both my money-making and my philanthropic activities, and which I have elaborated into a not yet properly understood philosophical theory"—reflexivity. In the case of dealing with death, he continued, our imperfect understanding (full of distortions and misconceptions) transforms the experience itself into something more negative than it need be, both for the dying and for those around them.

The personal motivation sprang from the deaths of his parents; indeed, he determined to fund such a project after his mother died, in 1989. Not long before she lost consciousness, Soros said, she had described to him how she was approaching the gates of Heaven—something reminiscent of the experiences of the dying that he had read about in books by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. "And she was concerned, because I was holding her hand, and she was afraid she was taking me with her," Soros said, smiling. "But I assured her no, that I was very firmly grounded." That, he said, had been a very positive experience, one in which his children, too, had participated—and one that, after years of preoccupation, made him fear his own death less.

But he also described the death of his father, in 1963. Soros had talked to me about his father, and about their similarities and—even more—their differences. He had emphasized the contrast between his father and him, as fathers; when Soros was a youth, he had judged his father harshly for being so devoted and attentive to him that, in his view, his father was living vicariously through him. "And at that time I decided that the buck stops with me, I will not be like that, I will not be a doting father who will build his own, let us say, fantasies through his children," he said. "Now, the unfortunate result of that was that I was actually quite a bad father with my first group of children." Moreover, while Soros's philanthropy has led some people to view him as an altruist or a Robin Hood (characterizations that he says are off the mark), he seems to feel that his father was more the genuine article: someone who was truly nonmaterialistic, charging those who could pay for his services—he was a lawyer—and working free for those who could not; who was outgoing and focussed on others; who derived his greatest pleasure from helping people directly (and, in fact, saved many lives during the Nazi occupation).

Now, however, Soros told this audience that his father, terminally ill, had agreed to an operation, "but he didn't want to live after the operation if his personal integrity was invaded. And, unfortunately, that was what happened. But then he wanted to live."

Speaking haltingly, Soros said, "I was kind of disappointed in him. I wrote him off." A few weeks later, he added, his father died. "I was there when he died, yet I let him die alone. I saw him, but I didn't touch him. The next day, I went to the office, but I didn't tell people he had died. I was, in a way, denying his dying." Later, when he read Kübler-Ross, Soros said, he realized that it might have made a difference if he had held his father's hand—but, he said, "I have since forgiven myself, because I did not know any better."

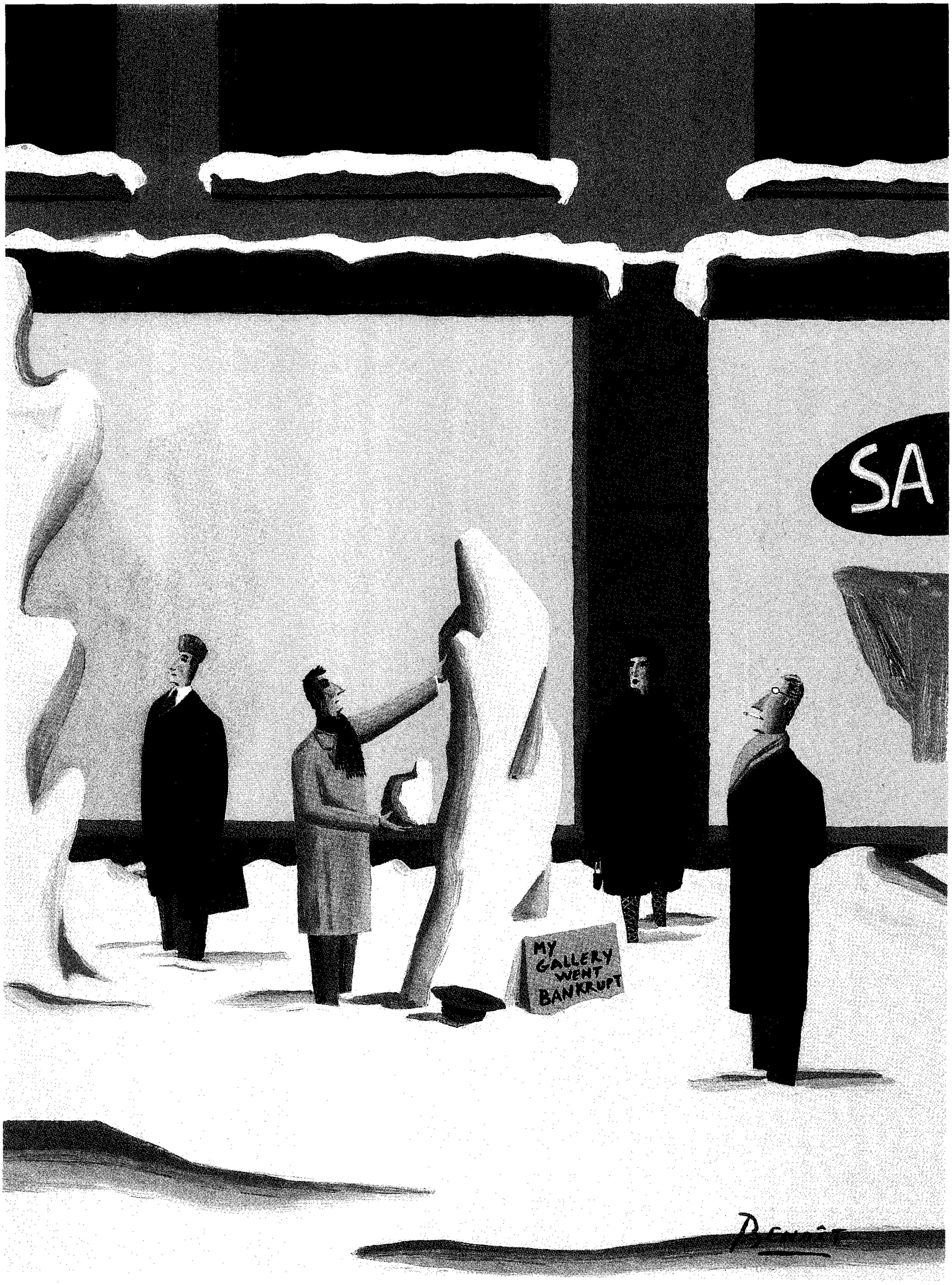
In a sense, Soros at such moments is once again venturing into a gray area—this time, where the lines between public and private blur, and the rules for human exchange are uncertain, and Soros does whatever he is impelled to do. One person who has known him for many years told me that he marvels at what seems, at times, "exhibitionism"; and he conjectures that Soros, an extremely undemonstrative person, who appears cold, detached, and insular, is, through these personal displays, attempting to forge some human connection—not with any one person but, rather, with many people. As, of course, his philanthropy also does.

Soros seems to suggest as much when he speaks of resolving the duality of his life and giving up the detachment it expressed. In one of our conversations, he did acknowledge that the reason he has decided to invest in countries that he had previously avoided is that opportunities have only now become attractive. Soros told me, "People who moved in six months ago have actually made ten times on their money." When I asked what had kept him from doing that himself, he responded, "I wasn't looking." And when I pressed him about what, exactly, had made him change his mind, he quickly replied, "The fact that people who invested six months ago made ten times on their money!"

But in another conversation he proposed a further, personal motivation—though, given Soros's instincts, this surely must have *followed*, not preceded, the business judgment. "By having these foundations, I was sort of able to play God, right?" Soros began, in his didactic way. "I was something above it, outside it, benevolent, farsighted, godlike—O.K.? If I become an investor, I come down to earth, you know? I'm just a player.

"So in some ways it may be the final coming to terms with being a human being, after all," he continued, with a trace of a smile. "In that way, I feel it's a little bit painful, quite tricky—but, in a way, it's the ultimate challenge: to accept the human condition." ♦

EASEL · BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS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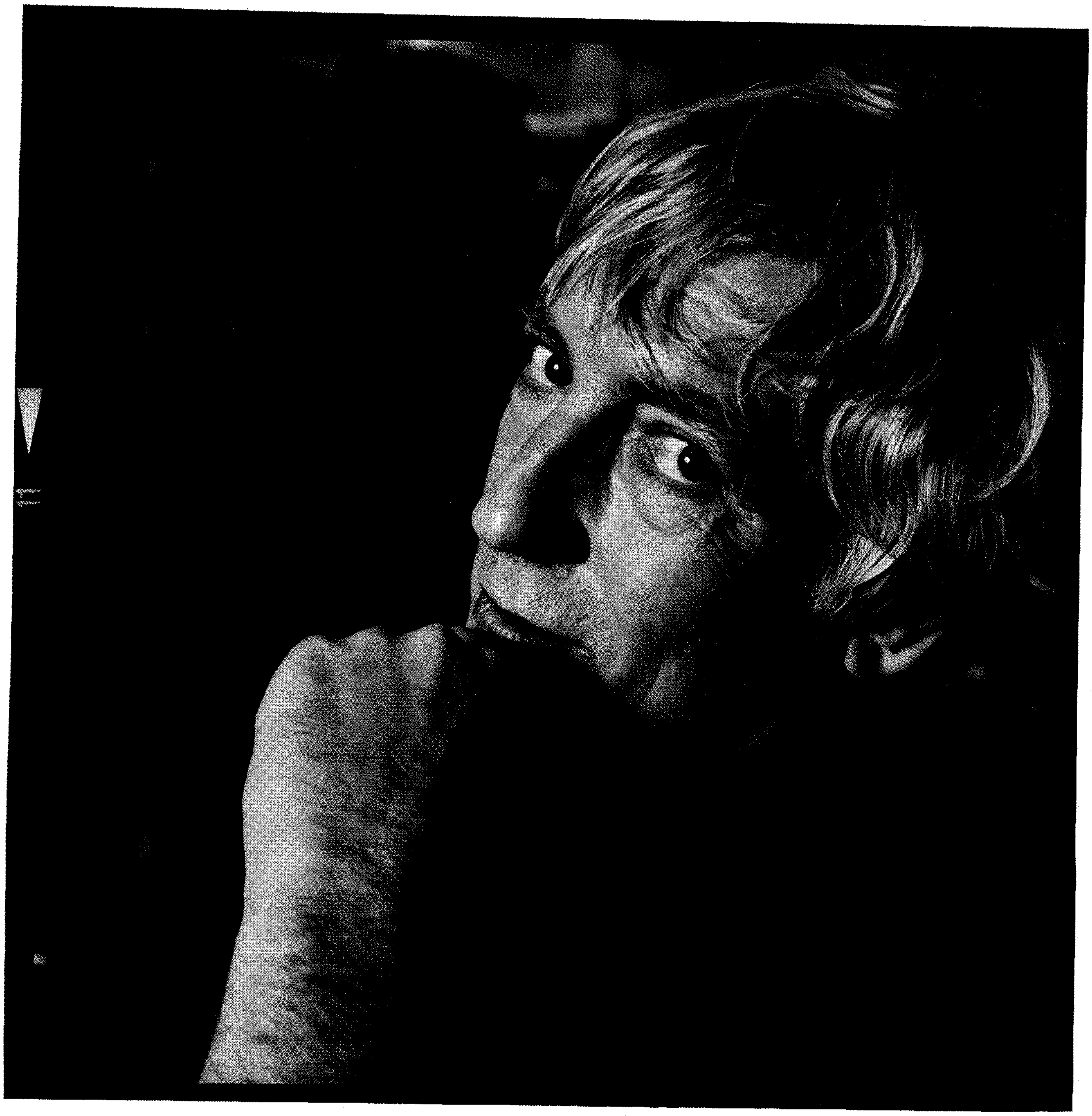


POSTSCRIPT

BEDAZZLED

The British comedians who worked with the late Peter Cook remember the man who transformed English humor in the sixties as the brightest light of "Beyond the Fringe."

BY JOHN LAHR

The legend of a great comedian dies with him. He lives in the moment, passing time with a generation or two, whose deliriums he identifies and sends up. The culture, too, dies a little death, and loses part of that promise of delight which is each funny man's gift to us. Peter Cook was a comedian's comedian, who died, too young, at fifty-seven, on January 9th, of a gastrointestinal hemorrhage. "Oh, God, the fucker's dead. There's a hole in the universe" is what Cook's former sidekick Dudley Moore thought when he got the news. Cook and Moore, along with Alan Bennett and Jonathan Miller, were part of the famous revue "Beyond the Fringe," which blasted the parochial shackles off English humor in the early sixties; they went on together to create the beloved (and much imitated) working-class palaver of "Pete n' Dud" and their scatological yobbo counterparts "Derek and Clive." "Pete's wife, Lin, called me about one in the morning to tell me he'd died," says Moore, who called it quits with revue sketches and with Cook in 1977. "I kept waking up afterward with this terrible sense of dread. So I phoned his home just to get his answering machine and to hear his voice."

When Cook was sober, his voice was elegant, polite, conventionally upper middle class; but his comic voice—the flat, reedy, nasal drone, with its bizarre phraseology, which he projected onto a series of preoccupied working-class and lower-middle-class obsessives—is what almost single-handedly took British comedy into fresh, bracing territory. "He was the greatest creator of comic material that I've ever come across," says John Cleese, one of the Monty Python team, who aped Cook's discoveries. "It was almost discouraging. Whereas most of us would take six hours to write a good three-minute sketch, it actually took Peter three minutes to write a three-minute sketch. I always thought he was the best of us, and the only one who came near being a genius, because genius, to me, has something to do with doing it much more easily than other people." In his life, Cook sometimes came face to face with this kind of praise. In 1979, the BBC broadcaster David Dimbleby asked Cook how he felt about being "probably the funniest Englishman since Chaplin." Cook thought about it; then, in his bland trademark twang, he said, "Well, this is no time for false modesty."

Cook's blessing and his burden was that as a teen-ager he came into British public life with his comic skills almost fully formed. He had already worked out his major comic maneuver: to combine the suburban with the surreal. He was amazingly fluent and freewheeling. The first sightings of Cook were decidedly sensational. He was tall, sinuous, and exceedingly charming. His combination of wit and aloofness made him catnip to both sexes. "There was something almost Firbankian about him," the Australian comic Barry Humphries, whom Cook helped to get a foothold in Britain, recalls. "He had the English public-school boy's habit of tossing back a forelock. He was one of those English people you can't quite reach. He was all the time joking. He never spoke seriously about anything for a second, so one didn't get near him."

Cook wasn't comfortable in the world, and he lived in a climate of mockery. At his public school, Radley, Cook had written a few farces; one was called "He Who Laughs." "It might be described as a posthumous work," he explained after he was installed at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he became president of the Footlights Revue. "It was put on after I left, and I never saw it myself." Jonathan Miller first saw Cook—"an astonishing, strange, glazed, handsome creature producing weird stuff the like of which I'd never heard before"—in the Footlights Revue. "I remember the first time I was shot upright in my seat by him," Miller says. "He was playing some person in a suburban kitchen concealed behind a newspaper. He didn't say a word. But all eyes were drawn to him. Then he rustled the paper and simply said, 'Hello, hello! I see the Titanic's sunk again.' One knew one was in the presence of comedy at right angles to all the comedy we'd heard." Dudley Moore was also impressed by the crazy logic and the sophistication of Cook's material. Moore remembers Cook at eighteen writing a sketch about a one-legged man auditioning for Tarzan. Cook, whose father was a colonial diplomat, played an appeasing film director. "I've got nothing against your right leg," the director says. "The trouble is, neither have you."

Cook's imagination, like his language, had the habit of taking absurdist turns, which impressed the old pros as much as the Young Turks. As an undergraduate, Cook contributed his comedy material not just to university revues but to well-known comedians, like the beaky, high-camp Kenneth Williams, who used Cook's routines for the bulk of his hit revue "Pieces of Eight" (1959). In one memorable sketch, which perhaps foreshadowed the most famous of Cook's gallery of demented sad sacks (the rumpled and wacky E. L. Wisty), Williams entered with a box, sat on the stage, and confided, "I've got a viper in this box. It's a viper. It's not an asp. It's a viper." The line quickly became a comic catchphrase. Even before Cook himself was a public figure, his comic voice—the banal monotone—was being widely imitated. "He must have left Cambridge in the summer of 1960, and I arrived in October," Cleese says. "His presence was still very much alive. Everybody was doing him. When I was doing the 1962 Footlights Revue, dear old Trevor Nunn, who was directing it, would sit down in the rehearsal breaks and do Peter Cook sketches. So we knew Peter's voice, and some of his material, before we'd ever set eyes on him."

Cleese, along with most of the theatregoing public on both sides of the Atlantic, set eyes on Cook during the five-year run of "Beyond the Fringe" on the West End and Broadway. "It was the funniest thing I've ever seen," he says. "And it remains that." According to Jonathan Miller, Cook contributed "a larger part of the script than anyone else." What distinguished him, Alan Bennett says, "was this effortless facility to improvise." In "Beyond the Fringe," Bennett had to follow one of Cook's solo spots. "It was supposed to go on for eight minutes," Bennett recalls. "And he would go on for twenty. Of course, it was wonderful stuff." Cook's monologue was a virtuoso bit of improvising; the thrill was in watching him ride the crest of that improvisational wave and remain elegantly on top of his material. The monologue began famously:

> Yes, I could have been a judge but I never had the Latin, never had the Latin for the judging, I just never had sufficient of it to get through the rigorous judging exams. They're noted for their rigor. People come

Photographs by David Bailey. Peter Cook in London, October, 1993.

PLASTILINA

It was a game of Truth more than Dare:
each of us revealing something intimate
to the others. What was there to fear,
visible only from our pink necks up?

When a pear-shaped man joined us in the tub,
I tried not to stare at the earrings
in his nipples. The filter went *glub-glub*,
swallowing the green, concentric ripples

his body made. An ugly yellow cat, lying
on the deck, lifted its head and roared
at us like the Metro-Goldwyn lion.
The thermostat checked, our testimonies resumed.

A Christian boy went first, unburdening
himself with the pleasure of a sinner
who'd brought about the undoing
of a foolish rural minister.

"Jesus brings His own rewards," he said blithely.
Oh, to be aloof as adulterous stray cats,
who gaze at us with bedroom eyes, politely
feeling nothing! Instead, memory,

"the key to everything," clings like lint
on a black velvet sofa, or a rooster's red crown
(the cock, remember, helped Peter repent),
perched insistently on its crowing head—

urging each of us, in accordance with laws
set down at the start, to recall some painful thing:
The one who'd kidnapped his son from in-laws.
The one who'd been shot at a post office.

The one who'd seen the Virgin illuminated.
The one who'd slept with a brother.
Unlike earth, which hardens, crusts, deteriorates,
the mind (or is it the heart, really?), once smothered,

recasts itself like the sculptor's dove-gray matter,
by degrees relief, medallion, small figurine:
whatever sad thing it was, mere fodder
for what, years hence, it might blissfully be.

—HENRI COLE

> staggering out saying, "My God, what a rigorous exam—" And so I became a miner instead. A coal miner. I managed to get through the mining exams—they're not very rigorous, they only ask you one question, they say "Who are you?" and I got seventy-five percent on that.

Even in the sketches that were written collaboratively, Cook's scorn for oafishness and his fierce, ironic understatement make his contributions easy to spot. In "Civil War," a sketch about what to do in case of a nuclear attack, Cook hectored the audience in his best pukka posture: "Get right out of it—get right out of it— If you're out of it you're well out of it, if you're in it you're really in it. If you are caught in it when the missile explodes, for goodness' sake don't move, stand absolutely stockstill—not under a tree, of course—that could be extremely dangerous."

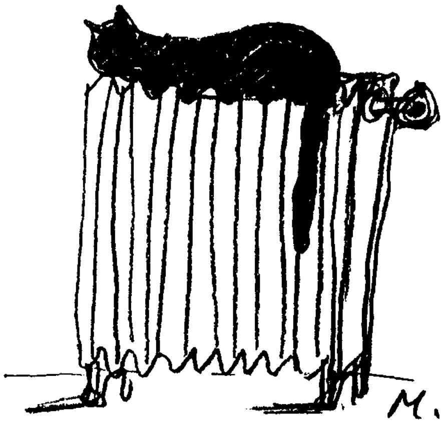
COOK has been dubbed "a master of satire" by the British newspapers, but satire wants to create a seismic disruption, and Cook was no instinctive disturber of the peace. "The idea that he had an anarchic, subversive view of society is complete nonsense," Jonathan Miller says. "He was the most upstanding, traditional upholder of everything English and everything establishment." Alan Bennett concurs: "He wasn't interested in satire at all. He was interested in being funny. I think he didn't like some of the harder-edge stuff, because it wasn't funny enough. He wasn't particularly into making any points. The thing that was political was his imitation of Prime Minister Macmillan. Nobody had ever done that on the stage before. When Macmillan came to the show, everybody knew he was there, so it was quite funny to begin with. But then Peter just started going for him; and he went on and on until the audience fell nearly totally silent. It never bothered him if he lost the audience. He was immune to embarrassment."

Cook's humor was not so much a shrewd method of attack as an ingenious style of retreat. His characters kept the public (and him) captivated and at a distance from deep emotion. Talking about psychoanalysis, and about the quest to "find" oneself, he told the New York *Times* in 1973, "I have a feeling that what I'd find I wouldn't like in the least, and nobody else would, either." There was a strange inconsistency between Cook's debonair façade—the part of him that Miller calls "the handsome paragon"—and the nervy, threadbare characters who inhabited him and were a barometer of some deeper impoverishment. As early as 1959, in one of his first interviews, Cook spoke of the appeal of these characters. "Sometimes I think of old men who live alone in single rooms," he said. "I see them listening to their portable radio sets and charting news bulletins, which then take on great importance in their pathetic little lives. They become amusing, not because one pokes fun at them, but because they make unimportant things seem important and base their lives on false premises." Cook didn't so much invent the characters as let the characters take him over. "It was like somebody was speaking through him," Alan Bennett says. And Miller adds, "I never knew Peter to be funny in his own voice. He was an interesting, amiable, pleasant, home-counties Tory. Quite suddenly, this other voice would speak through him, and then he would be taken possession of, sometimes for two or three hours at a stretch." In later years, as Cook's appetite for alcohol increased and he became more chaotic, his friends frequently found that the only way to be with him was to enter his fantasy. "There wasn't any ordinariness there," Bennett says. "There wasn't any just sitting around chatting. He'd go off into some riff or other. He was always performing."

But in the salad days of the sixties Cook was a kind of Sun King of Comedy, with a court of followers. No contemporary British comedian seized his moment with more generosity or ventilated English life with more raffish assurance. He used his newfound power and prestige to turn over the comic soil of Great Britain. Cook owned sixty-six per cent of Britain's satirical magazine *Private Eye*, which he also helped to edit, and for which he invented the cartoon-bubble cover and such popular features as "True Stories" and "Mrs. Wilson's Diary." At *Private Eye*, where he was called Cookie by the editor, Richard Ingrams, and was known in print as Lord Gnome, Cook was very much the centerpiece. "I was sometimes appalled by the immoderate laughter that greeted all of Peter's *mots*," Humphries, who was still an upstart outsider, says. Humphries saw clearly that at the magazine the caste system of public school had been extended into real life. "It was run by the prefects, who were Cook, Ingrams, and Willie Rushton. And the fags were people like Tony Rushton, Willie's cousin, who did the layout, and Barry Fantoni, who contributed feuilletons. Occasionally, ravaged schoolmasters, like Claud Cockburn and Malcolm Muggeridge, were let into the prefects' study."

In 1961, Cook and a partner bankrolled The Establishment, billed as "London's First Satirical Nightclub"; characteristically, he drew a comparison for the press between his Soho "satirical venue" and Berlin cabaret, "which did so much to stop the rise of Hitler and prevent the outbreak of the Second World War." The Establishment is where such bright new comic lights as John Bird, Eleanor Bron, and John Fortune got their education in public; where Frankie Howerd had his spectacular renaissance; and where Lenny Bruce made his English début. It was also where Barry Humphries introduced Edna Everage to the British public. "It was courageous of Peter to put me there," says Humphries, whose housewife superstar was voted one of the idols of the decade by *The Observer* at the end of the eighties. "I don't think I did as well as I could have. I mystified people. Not many people turned up." Still, Cook backed Humphries and gave him a leg up into *Private Eye* by persuading the cartoonist Nicholas Garland to let Humphries write the text to the Barry McKenzie comic strip, a saga of a beer-swilling Aussie innocent, which became a cult satire of London high life and the subject of two feature films. "Peter's generosity was unusual in a profession notoriously self-seeking and fraught with petty jealousies," Humphries says.

By the mid-seventies, Cook's successful partnership with Dudley Moore was foundering. Cook, who had been the leader of the pack after "Beyond the Fringe," could still spin wonderful yarns, but his comrades in comedy had started to outpace him. Moore was getting interested in Hollywood movies, Bennett was writing West End plays, and Miller was directing theatre and opera all over the world. Cook, by contrast, was treading water. He began to drink; and those who, like Humphries, sometimes drank with him got another impression of his cavalier persona. "Peter was pretty well topped up most of the seventies and eighties," Humphries says. "He had too much of a sense of cosmic joke to ever reveal self-pity. I got the feeling of sorrow—sorrow about the end of the Dudley Moore alliance. Peter felt enormous frustration. I think rage is not an exaggeration."



Cook joked about his lack of ambition. "I suppose I have some regrets," he once said. "But I can't remember what they are." At other times, he was defiant: "I don't give a toss if people say I haven't fulfilled my promise." The real problem was that Cook's special kind of intellectual hijinks had nowhere to go. "He hated doing anybody else's words," Moore says. "He couldn't remember anybody else's words." Cook was a miniaturist. His gift was for the dead word, the daft deconstruction of logic, the surrealist aside. "Ideally, I like two at a time on the stage—and a four-minute duration of dialogue," he said in 1959; and his literary horizon never really expanded much farther than that. But within those parameters Cook could make huge, ineffable moments out of his characters' tiny minds. ("Oh, the same thing happened to me, Dud," Pete moans. "Knock, knock, knock at the window. Who's there? Bloody Greta Garbo! Wearing a see-through shortie nightdress. I said, 'Ged off!' ")

Cook had many cameo performances in movies, none of them particularly distinguished. "After his great stage and TV successes, he had nowhere to go, because basically the way up was via film," says Cleese, who, with Graham Chapman, wrote the 1970 film "The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer," in which Cook had the lead. "And although he was a great sketch performer, he wasn't a very good actor. I would suspect that it was something to do with the fact that he wasn't very comfortable with his emotions, and as an actor you have to be able to access your emotions. In the milieu where he grew up, emotions were kept very much out of the way, and were regarded as these occasional nuisances that surface and complicate life. And, as far as writing was concerned, he never got interested in writing longer pieces—in the problems of structuring a full-length thing." Cook did write a few movies. One of them, "Bedazzled" (1967), was his version of the Seven Deadly Sins, and had Raquel Welch cast as Lust—or, specifically, Miss Lillian Lust. "He didn't want the film to be called 'Bedazzled,' " says Cook's friend the humorist Martin Lewis, who produced "The Secret Policeman's Other Ball" (1982), in which Cook was featured in many skits with the Python people. "He wanted it to be called 'Raquel Welch.' I inquired why, and he said because he fancied the marquee saying, 'Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in Raquel Welch.' He said, 'For some reason, the distributors didn't see the point.' "

Cook and Moore were magisterial in their mischief. "It was ideal," Cook said of their partnership. "I doubt if I will ever do anything better." The lanky Cook and the pint-size Moore cut a memorable comic silhouette. They sparked and amused each other with what John Bird calls "a spontaneous combustion of comic invention," and their legacy of liberating cut-and-thrust is visible in other contemporary British comic double acts: Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones, Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie, Jennifer Saunders and Dawn French. In "Good Evening" (1973-75), a two-man show that toured around the world, with stops on Broadway (four hundred and thirty-eight performances) and the West End, the sludge of Pete and Dud's bluff discourse—the know-it-all versus the sycophant—made a hilarious spectacle of their ignorance and credulity. In one sketch, "Gospel Truth," Peter, dressed as a shepherd, is being interviewed by Dudley for the Bethlehem *Star* about the birth of Jesus:

PETER: Yes. Well, it's quite simple, really . . . er . . . basically what happened was that me and the lads were abiding in the fields.

DUDLEY (*writing*): Abiding in the fields . . . yes . . .

PETER: Yes . . . mind you, I can't abide these fields . . .

DUDLEY: No?

PETER: I mean, look around you—they are unabidable fields.

DUDLEY: Yeh . . .

PETER: I'd say these are about the most unabidable bleeding fields I've ever had to abide in.

DUDLEY: Yeh . . . I'll abide by that. (*Dudley laughs at his joke. Peter is unmoved.*) No . . . no . . . my apologies . . . You were abiding in the fields? . . .

PETER: . . . and we were watching our flocks by night.

DUDLEY (*writing*): Watching our flocks by night . . . yeh . . .

PETER: Yes . . . cos that's when you have to watch 'em, you know, that's when they get up to all their rubbish.

In the ravings and songs of "Derek and Clive" Cook took the opportunity, according to Moore, "to do things that were very extraordinary—very obscene things that we couldn't do on a regular basis." He adds, "He wanted to scare the shit out of me, and now and again he did." The first "Derek and Clive" record, which had "Warning, must not be played to miners" stamped across it, is an exercise in liberty, and even in the most stolid adult heart it can still inspire a vulgar sense of infantile exhilaration. "Cook, even when drunk, elevated scatology to a lyrical plane," Barry Humphries says. One Derek and Clive song, about a man afraid to jump from a burning building, is set to a seventeenth-century Christian chant. The crowd sings:

Jump, you fucker, jump.
Jump into this 'ere blanket
What we are holding
And you will be alright.
He jumped. Hit the deck.
Broke his fuckin' neck.
There was no blanket.
Laugh? We nearly shat.
We have not laughed so much
Since Grandma died
Or Auntie Mabel caught
Her left tit in the mangle.
We are miserable sinners

Filthy fuckers
Aaaahrsoles!

BY 1977, Moore and Cook had stopped performing together. "There was nothing more to be done," Moore says. Moore wanted to change the direction of his career ("I didn't want to do sketch material anymore. I wanted to do material where I could act"), and Cook, it seemed, couldn't change. In 1973, during the Australian tour of "Good Evening," Cook, who had been served with divorce papers by his first wife (he was married three times), began going onstage drunk. "I couldn't understand why for four or five days he was blitzed out of his mind, not apologizing for it and not aware, it seemed, of what chaos he was causing," Moore says. Over the years, with the success of "10" and "Arthur," Moore's celebrity grew; Cook's declined. "Greatly to his credit, he didn't resent the fact that Dudley had taken off," Alan Bennett says. "Dudley can't write. Peter could, and all the sketches were written by Peter. And then Dudley took off and made a fortune in Hollywood." But Moore admits to some "disease" between them over the last twenty years. In private, Cook may have denied any envy; but in public the tone of his quips told another story. "Perhaps if I had been born with a club foot and a height problem, I'd have been as desperate as Dudley to become a star," he said. Increasingly, drink became a problem. In the early seventies, a thirteen-week gig as a BBC live-talk-show host was cancelled after the first show, when Cook rose to greet his first guest, Kirk Douglas. Instead of asking "How are you?" Cook asked, "Who are you?"

Cook was a familiar figure on the Hampstead High Street, trudging to the supermarket in colored sneakers for his cigarettes and booze, his lithe figure now potbellied, his fingers nicotine-stained, his hair dyed blond. To Jonathan Miller, he seemed "a swollen, smoked, rather spirit-logged figure." Miller remembers that one day during this phase his wife, Rachel, spotted Cook. "Oh," she said. "Peter's gone prematurely orange."

By then, Cook had married his third wife, a Malaysian woman named Lin Chong, who lived apart from him. "It was probably the first time he'd experienced a fairly ordinary, decent sort of love," Dudley Moore says. "Peter wasn't mad about women; he was a bit of a misogynist. He used to sort of adopt an attitude of the suburban working-class person who rather grumblingly accepts the fact of a woman in his household—'Yes, dear, yes.' " This attitude may have been what drove his previous wives, Wendy Snowden and Judy Huxtable, to treat him with disdain. Humphries, who found Cook somewhat "henpecked" at home, recalls, "It was always quite a surprise, when one rather idolized him, to hear someone speaking to him as though he were a kind of fool, or even a cuckold."

When I met up with Cook at his dishevelled Hampstead mews house in the late eighties, to interview him for a book on Dame Edna, his shaky hand was spiking his morning coffee with Scotch; the sound of the doorbell sent him lurching to the window to peek out in case it was the tax collector, to whom he owed, he said, seventy thousand pounds. Last year, though, Cook made a scintillating appearance on a TV show called "Clive Anderson Talks Back," in which he performed as four guests—a judge,

Peter Cook: "Most of us would take six hours to write a good three-minute sketch," John Cleese says. "It actually took Peter three minutes."

a soccer manager, a seventies rock star, and a biscuit quality controller. "The tragedy is that he was really getting his life under much greater control," John Cleese says. "He was looking much better. He was trimmer. Then he lost his mother, and he slipped back into drinking."

The news of Cook's death came as no surprise to Moore. "We all expected it," he said. "He was ingesting everything." Four years ago, Cook was warned by doctors to stop drinking. "He really loved drink more than he loved life," Cleese says. "At some point, he almost took the choice that he would rather live a shorter time and drink. That was the great sadness, because his close friends—and, latterly, I counted myself as being very, very close with him—made some feeble attempts to say something. He responded not in an unfriendly way but by slightly changing the subject, and also with a slightly humorous defiance."

Defiance was always part of the ironic game that Cook played with the English public. "One of the ways of avoiding being beaten by the system is to laugh at it," he said. He lived quietly, by his own defiant standards, lobbing his little jolts of joy and fury into the community when the voices came to him. Like all great comedians, he understood his gift well enough to know that he couldn't reliably control it. When you're hot, you're hot, as they say, and when you're not, you're not. His life made a spectacle of both sides of that equation: the glorious transformation and the punishing demoralization. He was resigned to his doomed contentment. As one of his characters, the restaurateur Sir Arthur Strebe-Greebling, owner of the Frog and Peach, puts it, "Oh, yes, I've learned from my mistakes and I'm sure I could repeat them exactly." ♦

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BOOKS

A FRESH HELL

Robert Pinsky offers a new translation of Dante's "Inferno."

BY EDWARD HIRSCH

THE journey into the underworld is one of the most obsessively recurring stories of the Western imagination. Something in us thrills to the metaphor of a hero descending into the bowels of the earth, into the region of demons and lost souls, and escaping to tell the tale. Greek mythology is filled with such fabulous descents: a Thracian minstrel (Orpheus) sings so poignantly that he charms his way into the netherworld to reclaim his lost bride; a man of murderous physical prowess (Heracles) sets off for Hades to retrieve a hellhound with three heads and a snake's tail in order to fulfill the last of twelve labors. In Book XI of Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus sails his ship into a country where the sun never shines, and there, pouring libations to the dead, he summons a swarm of ghosts, among them an unburied friend, his aged mother, and the seer Tiresias. This is echoed in Book VI of Virgil's Aeneid, when Aeneas persuades the Sibyl of Cumae to guide him into Hades, so he can speak with his dead father about the future. As Homer's scene informed Virgil's, so Virgil's account served as a prototype for Dante's "Inferno"—the most entrancing, detailed, and audacious treatment of a human being's journey into Hell ever written.

"The Divine Comedy" consists of a hundred cantos, divided into three parts: "Inferno," "Purgatorio," and "Paradiso." It is at once a metaphysical adventure story (a pilgrim goes forth to discover the fate of souls after death), a personal odyssey understood in allegorical terms ("Midway on our life's journey," the poem famously begins, "I found myself/In dark woods"), an encyclopedic guide to the schematics of the otherworld (from the doomed in Hell, through the atoning sinners in Purgatory, to the blessed souls in Heaven), and a quest beyond the grave for a visionary beauty (Beatrice, who is at different times compared to divine grace in the Church, to the Virgin Mary, and even to Christ himself). The poem is a kind of Augustinian confession: a search for the Absolute written under the sign of eternity, a conversion narrative about losing one's way and turning toward God's light. The "Inferno" is the first installment of the pilgrim's three-part spiritual journey, but it seems to have held a nearly exclusive claim on the majority of modern readers. James Merrill has pointed out that "to most twentieth-century readers the 'Inferno' *is* Dante." Apparently, the siren song of damnation calls to us in ways that atonement and salvation do not—perhaps because we recognize ourselves in the lost, unhappy sinners who emanate from the shadows.

In Dante, damnation speaks to us in ways that atonement and salvation do not.

SERGIO RUZZIER

In guiding us through a permanently apocalyptic landscape, Dante was also representing his idea of life on earth. In the Foreword to Robert Pinsky's splendid new translation, "The Inferno of Dante" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $35), John Freccero, the dean of American Dante scholars, notes, "Hell is the state of the soul after death, but it is also the state of the world as seen by an exile whose experience has taught him no longer to trust the world's values." Dante was exiled in perpetuity from his beloved city of Florence on false political charges in 1302, and by the time he wrote the "Inferno"—the poem is set in 1300 but was composed sometime between 1307 and 1314—he had come to view his birthplace with the skeptical, unforgiving eye of a disabused lover. Here is the opening salvo of Canto XXVI:

Rejoice, O Florence, since you are so great,
Beating your wings on land and on the sea,
That in Hell too your name is spread about!

I found among those there for their thievery
Five of your citizens . . .

So the "Inferno" is, among other things, a fantastic dream of retribution, "a pawnshop in which all the countries and cities known to Dante were left unredeemed" (Osip Mandelstam), and a treatise on the corrupt and degraded state of society. We don't share Dante's medieval cosmology or politics, but twentieth-century readers have had no trouble recognizing his portrait of Hell as a stand-in for a secular human city.

"The Inferno of Dante" is an informative bilingual edition, with the Italian printed *en face.* It has Freccero's excellent Foreword; useful notes; a detailed plan of Dante's journey through Hell; and thirty-five black-and-white monotypes by the artist Michael Mazur. These are beautifully eerie and restrained—a visual backdrop to the dark night of the soul that constitutes Dante's voyage. Most important, Robert Pinsky's verse translation is fast-paced, idiomatic, and accurate. It moves with the concentrated gait of a lyric poem—the "Inferno" is, after all, an account of two poets, Dante and his guide, Virgil, walking through the nine descending circles of Hell—and the grand sweep of a nineteenth-century novel: Hell is filled with Dostoyevskian sufferers, disenfranchised crowds, Sadean torments. The primary strength of this translation is the way it maintains the original's episodic and narrative velocity while mirroring its formal shape and character. It is no small achievement to reproduce Dante's rhyme scheme and at the same time sound fresh and natural in English, and Pinsky succeeds in creating a supple American equivalent for Dante's vernacular music where many others have failed. This translator is first and foremost a poet.

Dante wrote the "Commedia" in Italian, which in his day was still a nebulous national language, rather than in the customary literary language of Latin, in order to be accessible to a wider audience. He compares himself to David, the "humble psalmist," and, in a sense, his poem sets itself up as a colloquial rival to Scripture. It claims enormous truths for itself in a fresh style. The language is by turns stately, demotic, and mercurial. It can be scholastically dense or intimately conversational. Neologisms, regional dialects, and Latin borrowings abound. Didactic stretches accelerate into passages of dizzying verbal majesty as souls become corporeal and words metamorphose into things. There is no replicating this linguistic richness in another language. As the Italian axiom has it, "*Traduttore traditore*" ("The translator is a traitor"), and in truth the back stacks of our libraries are littered with treacheries, but Pinsky takes his place in a line of estimable poetic predecessors—among them Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1867) and Laurence Binyon (1933)—who have not only wrestled with Dante's content but also found adventurous formal equivalents for his style and music.

Dante's use of terza rima, a marvellous instrument that he devised specifically for the "Commedia," is the greatest obstacle to translating the poem into English. He composed his poem in interlocking three-line stanzas called *terzine*, or tercets, which rhyme in the pattern aba, bcb, cdc, etc. Rhyming the first and third lines gives each tercet a sense of temporary closure; rhyming the second line with the first and last lines of the next stanza generates a strong feeling of propulsion. The effect is both open-ended and conclusive, like moving through a series of interpenetrating rooms (indeed, the Italian word *stanza* means "room") or going down a set of winding stairs: you are always travelling forward while looking backward. The movement is reinforced by Dante's skillful use of the hendecasyllabic (eleven-syllable) line common to Italian poetry. Its rhythm incarnates the spiralling action of the form; in fact, many scholars have pointed to the spiral as the closest geometric equivalent to terza rima. (One has even compared it to the helixes of DNA.) The momentum of each canto—an urgency slowed by retrospection—mirrors the larger voyage of the pilgrim through the poem.

It has been estimated that translating the entire "Divine Comedy" into terza rima requires more than forty-five hundred triple rhymes in English. This is a staggering number; whereas Italian is abundantly rich in rhyme, English is relatively poor. English rhymes are also more emphatic than Italian ones, more ringing and noticeable. No wonder that Byron labelled Dante "the most untranslatable of poets." Previous translations have often buckled under the nearly intolerable weight of trying to reproduce Dante's form in credible English. Even such ambitious formal versions of the "Inferno" as those by Dorothy Sayers (1949) and John Ciardi (1954)—who uses a "dummy," or defective, terza rima, leaving out the linking middle rhyme—contort English syntax and strain English diction in order to match the Italian rhyme scheme. It's easy for the imitator of terza rima to feel, in the English poet C. H. Sisson's phrase, "like a clown following a ballet dancer," and in recent decades the most accurate translations have tended to shun rhyme altogether.

The student of the "Inferno" can turn with confidence to the prose version of the Dante scholar Charles Singleton (1970), the most comprehensive annotated edition in our language, and to the blank-verse versions of Mark Musa (1971), Sisson himself (1980), Allen Mandelbaum (1980), and Tom Phillips (1985), whose jaunty carriage makes his blank verse especially pleasurable. These versions gesture toward the poem's form—its body—without trying to approximate its true shape. Even Longfellow, whose translation is a magnificent work in its own right, eschews rhyme in favor of a Miltonic blank verse. Every translator knows that terza rima isn't extraneous to Dante's work (T. S. Eliot once said that "Dante *thought* in terza rima"), but that doesn't make it any less difficult to transport. As if to make the point, Shelley's "Triumph of Life," the finest English poem ever written in the form, was unfinished at his death.

There have been at least fifty renderings of the "Inferno" into English in our century, but Pinsky's is the first rhyming translation unmarred by antiquarianism. He consistently employs slant or half rhymes (pain/sin/down; night/thought/it) as well as full rhymes (dwell/Hell/well), in order to re-create Dante's form while remaining true to his meaning. Consonantal rhyming, based on similar rather than identical internal vowel sounds, allows for a more flexible, more complex, and even dissonant sense of rhythm and harmony. This tactic is crucial when it comes to rhyming disyllabic words, since triple half rhymes (quiet/spirit/merit) don't stop with the dull thud that triple full rhymes do (quailing/railing/wailing) at the ends of English lines. It is precisely these disyllabic, or "feminine," rhymes that have undone so many previous translators. Pinsky's use of Dickinson's or Yeats's method of slant rhyme—to name only two of the poets who fully mastered its effects—supplied him with, in his words, "an audible scaffold of English terza rima, a scaffold that does not distort the English sentence, or draw excessively on the reaches of the English lexicon."

Pinsky also makes accommodations and compromises. He readily admits that he doesn't follow the original line by line, or even stanza by stanza, and that at times he foreshortens cantos in order to mimic Dante's epigrammatic compression. Occasionally, Pinsky, too, wrenches rhymes into place; it's hard to imagine anyone actually saying "Although their burden held them in retard" (XXIII) or "Which wins all battles if it does not despond" (XXIV). While Pinsky uses enjambment—the carrying of phrases across lines—as one of his most successful strategies, he moves sentences across both lines and stanzas more aggressively than Dante, and so runs the risk of emphasizing the poem's forward momentum at the expense of its retro-

RELIEF

We know it is close
to something lofty.
Simply getting over being sick
or finding lost property
has in it the leap,
the purge, the quick humility
of witnessing a birth—
how love seeps up
and retakes the earth.
There is a dreamy
wading feeling to your walk
inside the current
of restored riches,
clocks set back,
disasters averted.

—Kay Ryan

spective vistas. Yet this tactic also enables him to capture the poem's swirling downward rhythm—what Dante calls "the hurricane of Hell in perpetual motion."

Dante's verse has a depth and gravity—at times whirling and tumultuous, at times stately and processional—that Pinsky captures exceedingly well. Here is how he translates the traditional epic invocation that begins Canto II:

Day was departing, and the darkening air
Called all earth's creatures to their evening quiet
While I alone was preparing as though for war

To struggle with my journey and with the spirit
Of pity, which flawless memory will redraw:
O Muses, O genius of art, O memory whose merit

Has inscribed inwardly those things I saw—
Help me fulfill the perfection of your nature.

These well-modulated lines evoke Dante's dark misgivings at the beginning of his project, his sense of foreboding as he battles exhaustion and despair. The pilgrim is about to descend into the underworld—"I am no Aeneas or Paul," he will soon declare—and wonders whether he is capable of sustaining a journey beyond death. He knows he will struggle with misplaced sympathy for the damned. And he questions whether he is worthy enough to write the epic (a contemporary Bible? a new Aeneid?) that we are about to read. Thus the triple invocation to the Muses, to the presiding spirit of art, and to the interior god of memory.

To appreciate the cadenced grandeur and Virgilian echoes of Pinsky's flexible iambic pentameter, one has only to compare it to a stilted rendering such as that by Dorothy Sayers: "Day was departing and the dusk drew on, / Loosing from labour every living thing / Save me, in all the world; I—I alone— / Must gird me to the wars—rough travelling." Sayers is actually a stricter translator than Pinsky. She follows Dante's lines and line endings more closely than he does, but one practically has to translate her translation ("I—I alone— / Must gird me to the wars"?) in order to figure out what the poet is saying. She distorts the syntax to maintain the rhymes, in the process making Dante sound like a weak Victorian poet.

A prose crib such as Charles Singleton's, which is nothing if not literal, seems to stand at the opposite extreme from Sayers' high-sounding verse. Here is his rendering of the same passage:

> Day was departing, and the dark air was taking the creatures on earth from their labors; and I alone was making ready to sustain the strife, both of the journey and of the pity, which unerring memory shall retrace. O Muses, O high genius, help me now! O memory that wrote down what I saw, here shall your worthiness appear!

This is preferable to Sayers, because, if nothing else, it's more accurate, and yet poetic models have to come from somewhere, even if they are outmoded or absorbed and expressed unconsciously. Singleton's intentionally flat version starts off agreeably enough, but soon he, too, imitates an archaic diction—"and I alone was making ready to sustain the strife"—that is alien to contemporary speech. And the phrase "both of the journey and of the pity," while it is an exact translation from the Italian, doesn't say much in English. What does it mean to "sustain the strife . . . of the pity"? The translator who is too much a literalist—even such a great Dantista as Singleton—runs the risk of transposing the words but sacrificing their meaning.

Pinsky steers a sure course between the Scylla and Charybdis of dogged literalism and high-flown lyricism, and as a result the contemporary reader experiences the startling seriousness of a pilgrimage that begins in dark woods, falters in the vestibule of Hell, and then proceeds according to an exact route from Limbo and the upper regions toward the center point of the earth. Dante takes pains to describe the journey with geometric and astrological precision, and Mazur has provided an "aerial view" with a schematic overlay at the beginning of Canto XI.

The protagonist of Dante's poem is bewildered by both what he sees and what he doesn't see in the shadowy nether regions, and he repeatedly turns to Virgil for explanations. Here, in Pinsky's strong mimetic rendering, is his initial encounter with the abyss:

The sighs, groans and laments at first were so loud,
Resounding through starless air, I began to weep:
Strange languages, horrible screams, words imbued

With rage or despair, cries as of troubled sleep
Or of a tortured shrillness—they rose in a coil
Of tumult, along with noises like the slap

Of beating hands, all fused in a ceaseless flail
That churns and frenzies that dark and timeless air
Like sand in a whirlwind. And I, my head in a swirl

Of error, cried: "Master, what is this I hear?"

In a spirited tale of mentorship, Virgil glosses the sights and sounds of Hell, and leads Dante through its physical and spiritual geography. The pilgrim is overwhelmed by the number of wretched souls passing before his eyes. One inevitably thinks of "The Waste Land" at the lines "I would not have thought / Death had undone so many," and, in fact, Eliot's work captures better than most the Dantesque world of living ghosts—the terrifying isolation of souls unmoored from community, alienated even from themselves. At every stage, Dante encounters individuals who want to tell him their heartbreaking stories: Francesca of Rimini, Ulysses, Count Ugolino, and a host of others. This is a key social aspect of the poem, which makes it feel both contemporary and historically rich.

In Dante's underworld, every figure stands for his own transgression. Dante borrowed from Aquinas the Aristotelian term *contrapasso*, or law of retribution, to designate a system in which the punishment distills and matches the crime. Sin is literalized: those who succumbed to anger tear perpetually at one another's naked bodies; gluttons wallow in putrid soil and get chewed by Cerberus; murderers boil in a river of blood. In an insightful note Pinsky suggests that Dante's portrayal of the living dead anticipates the Romantic creation of horror as a literary—and, later, cinematic—genre. The uncanny metamorphosis of human beings continues to intensify throughout the poem, since the farther down Dante and Virgil go the more heinous are the crimes they encounter, until finally, in the darkness of point zero, they crawl across the body of Lucifer himself.

At the conclusion of the poem, the pilgrim (and, by extension, the reader) feels a liberating sense of release at escaping Hell and glimpsing the heavens again:

To get back up to the shining world from there
My guide and I went into that hidden tunnel;

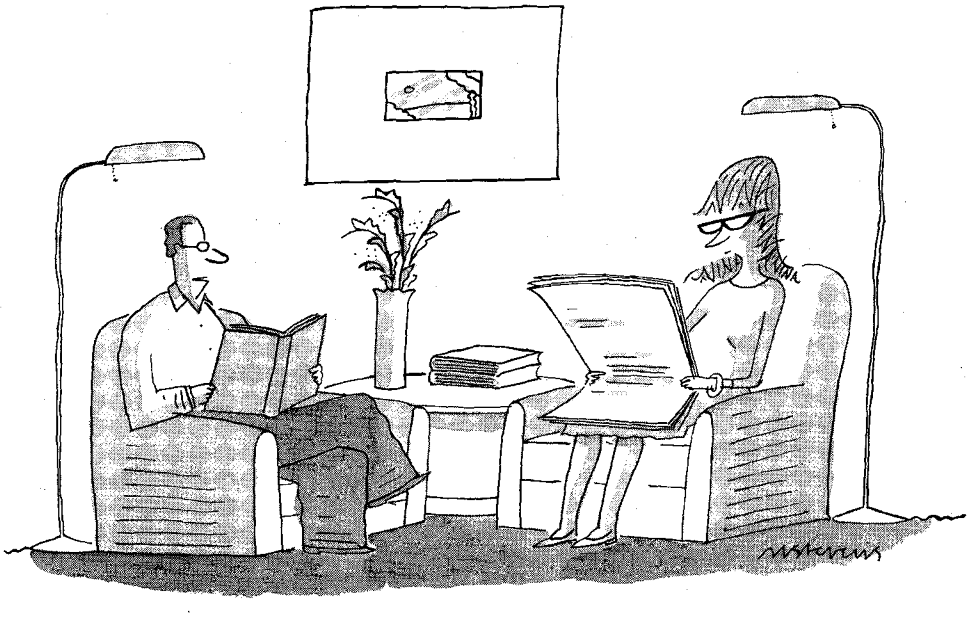
And following its path, we took no care
To rest, but climbed: he first, then I—so far,
Through a round aperture I saw appear

Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,
Where we came forth, and once more saw the stars.

In recent times, it has been argued, by Erich Auerbach, among others, that Dante's characters are so sympathetically drawn and so realistically portrayed that they subvert the rigid categories in which the allegorist has ensnared them. Dante's medieval typology (the progression from Sins of Incontinence to Sins of Fraud) doesn't mean much to us anymore. It is not the "allegory of theologians" but the flawed humanity of Dante's characters that excites and touches readers. In Auerbach's words, "the beyond becomes a stage for human beings and human passions." This is a tempting argument. It's not particularly troubling to think of schismatics being divided from themselves, but it's another matter to encounter the Provençal poet Bertran de Born, who was beheaded, and whose trunk is forever carrying around his severed head, "gripping its hair like a lantern, letting it swing." And while it's one thing to learn of political treachery that sends traitors to Antenora, in the ninth circle, it's quite another to witness Ugolino, who died of starvation, gnawing his enemy's skull and reliving the story of his gruesome last days. The suffering of individuals writhing in the torture cell of eternity calls out to us from beyond the grave.

Yet in any full reading of the "Inferno" it is crucial to distinguish between two Dantes: the pilgrim passing through the divisions and subdivisions of Hell, and the poet "remembering" the journey and writing an epic poem about it. Readers identify with the pilgrim, whose heart goes out to "the disconsolate and mutilated shades," but that pilgrim can be readily distinguished from the author, who is unwavering in his judgments. For example, as Freccero notes, the pilgrim Dante seems truly anguished to discover his mentor Brunetto Latini among the sodomites in the seventh circle, but it must be remembered that the poet Dante placed him there. God didn't write the "Inferno," or decide that there would be no reprieves in the City of Woes, or inscribe over the portals the infamous words "ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE." Freccero puts the matter succinctly: "In spite of Dante's reputation as the greatest of Christian poets, there is no sign of Christian forgiveness in the 'Inferno.' The dominant theme is not mercy but justice, dispensed with the severity of the ancient law of retribution." Readers will always find that the humane perspective of the pilgrim clashes with the viewpoint of the icy administrator of justice, but that's precisely the point. The tension between the temporal and the transcendental orders—between guilty individuals crying out and an anonymous system of justice relentlessly dispensing with them—is what gives the poem so much of its terrifying force, and the poet his complex, judicial grandeur.

Pinsky's translation is well suited to our time. He has created an idiom that brilliantly suggests the work of both a medieval allegorist and a proto-modern thinker, and, above all, of a writer—one who dramatizes the desperate vulnerability of human beings caught up in an implacable world. At our own apocalyptic moment in history, the reader can scarcely forget that the "Inferno" is a book in which the earth opens and the historical world is suspended outside time. The progress of the soul through the underworld is a theme that cannot date, but it does seem to have special relevance to the modern dilemma. Perhaps that's why the "Inferno," as opposed to the "Purgatorio" and the "Paradiso," has inspired so many devastating modern works, which burn with a true infernal flame—from Gogol's "Dead Souls" and Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" to Eliot's "Waste Land," Camus's "The Fall," and Malcolm Lowry's "Under the Volcano." Dante seems to have anticipated the nervous, unholy epoch in which we find ourselves. Purgatory and Paradise belong to the ages, but Hell is recognizably ours. ♦



"When did you start putting 'Nina's in your hair?"

THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK

Worlds collide in Salman Rushdie's new collection.

BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

"REALISM can break a writer's heart," says the narrator of Salman Rushdie's 1983 novel "Shame." "Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either. What a relief!" It's impossible to read these lines today without the sense that grim literalism has revenged itself upon irony. Rushdie, the Pandora of postmodernism, has forever dispelled any doubt about the potency of the modern fairy tale.

"East, West" (Pantheon; $21) is a collection of nine such fairy tales; in one of them, fictional characters have been detaching themselves from the novels, films, and paintings where they belong and taking their place among the flesh-and-blood. "This permeation of the real world by the fictional is a symptom of the moral decay of our post-millennial culture," the narrator soberly intones. "There can be little doubt that a large majority of us opposes the free, unrestricted migration of imaginary beings into an already damaged reality." It's a fable that nimbly reminds us how vast a gulf exists between Rushdie and the literalists who seek to destroy him. They read fiction as fact; Rushdie urges us to consider the ways in which "fact"—what we take to be natural and real—may be fiction. In a 1985 essay he wrote, "The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature."

The literature of migrancy may be the literature of border-crossing, but Rushdie reminds us that borders crossed aren't merely the kind drawn in dirt. His restless intelligence is forever challenging the lines between East and West, the past and the present, *Homo ludens* and *Homo sapiens*, realism and fantasy. (He has admitted that the techno-phantasmagorias of J. G. Ballard strike him as much more "realistic" than the ostensibly ordinary settings conjured by Anita Brookner.) If there are cultural traditions that belong to the West and to the East, there is also, he insists, a third tradition, a tradition of displacement and exile which belongs to neither. Of course, the big themes of migrancy—cultural heterogeneity, the fragmented and hybrid nature of identity—are equally the pet themes of literary postmodernism. And make no mistake: there isn't an artist more self-conscious than Salman Rushdie. (His critical essays bristle with references to such postmodernist pashas as Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard.) But the literary resources of migrancy are more than theoretical. It hasn't escaped the British literary establishment that a lot of what's most compelling in contemporary fiction has been written by people with names like David Malouf, Timothy Mo, V. S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, and, yes, Salman Rushdie—people who have, in one way or another, dwelled at the margins of the Commonwealth. "Literature is not in the business of copyrighting certain themes for certain groups," Rushdie has wisely cautioned. Still, we've all had a chance to see what happens when, as the saying goes, the Empire writes back.

Rushdie's new book is divided into three sections of three stories each—the headings are "East," "West," and "East, West"—but such a division seems designed to illustrate the instability of divisions. Inevitably, the "East" stories are also about the West; the "West" stories are also about the East; and the "East, West" stories are about both but also neither. There are stories about totems—Dorothy's ruby slippers, the Prophet's hair. There are stories that weirdly refract characters from other sources, including "The Wizard of Oz" and "Star Trek." And there are stories whose sheer literary effrontery takes your breath away—like one entitled "Yorick," a tour de force of pastiche. It's "Hamlet" as retold by Laurence Sterne's Parson Yorick, complete with Sternean dashes and asterisks; but it's also an assertion of literary genealogy, invoking as it does Rushdie's great precursor in the

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art of nonlinear and fragmented narrative.

What makes the collection work *as* a collection is its juxtaposition of contrasting voices, from the windy cadences of "Yorick" 's eighteenth-century wit—"It's a true fact that men take an equal pleasure in annihilating both the ground upon which they stand while they live and the substance (I mean paper) upon which they may remain, immortalized, once this same ground is over their heads instead of under their feet"—to the snappish tone of the Indian narrator of "The Free Radio": "The boy was an innocent, a real donkey's child, you can't teach such people." Rushdie's mastery of ventriloquism is such that it's finally beside the point to ask (as the old Charlie McCarthy routine has it) who's the dummy.

It's another futile exercise to look for a centering theme in a book so distrustful of all centers; but there may be a centering *non*-theme in the book's repudiation of the idea, and ideology, of "home." While fashionable revisionists have been peddling the story of Christopher Columbus as vile proto-imperialist, Rushdie's "Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain Consummate Their Relationship" refigures Columbus as the ultimate migrant, whose voyage is a means of breaking away from the very patronage that makes it possible. A more expeditious way of leaving home is to take leave of your senses, as does Eliot, the Welsh guru in "The Harmony of the Spheres." And in "The Courter" the narrator's beloved ayah develops a mysterious heart ailment that turns out to be a quite literal form of homesickness, and prompts her to return to the Subcontinent. Something like this must have been in the minds of the eighteenth-century physiologists who coined the word "nostalgia" (compounded from the Greek *nostos*, "a return home," and *algos*, "pain"). If Rushdie isn't wholly free of nostalgia himself, his larger aim is to critique nostalgia, the specious comforts of home and homelands. Pace Robert Frost, Rushdie sees home as a place where, when you have to go there, you're *really* out of luck.

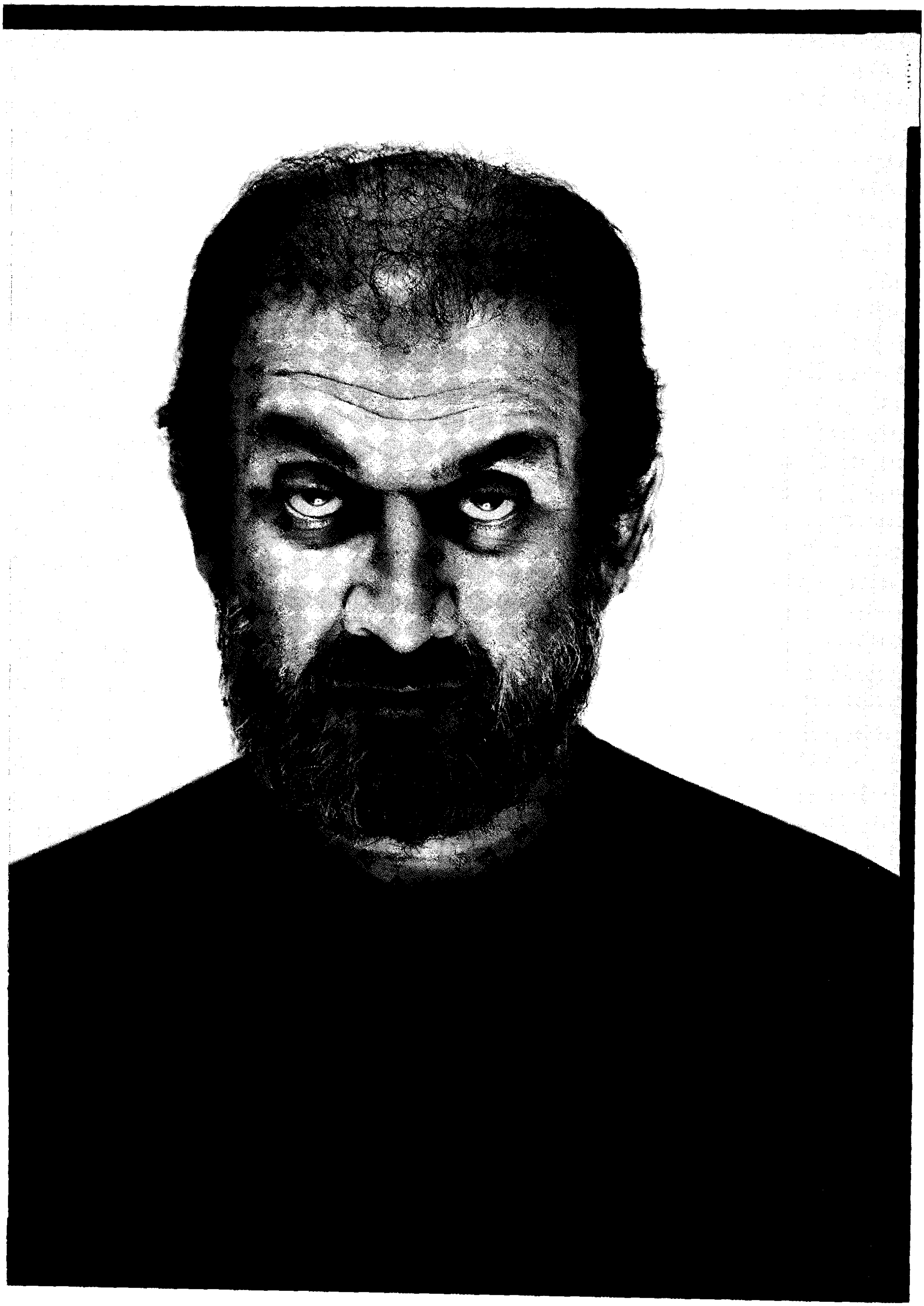
The seductions of home are most squarely the preoccupation of "At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers," a story that evokes Donald Barthelme in its lunatic stolidity. "Behind bullet-proof glass, the ruby slippers sparkle. We do not know the limits of their powers. We suspect that these limits may not exist." While the slippers repose in their high-security case, the whole world prepares to bid for them: they're an item of unquantifiable value. "Around the—let us say—shrine of the ruby-sequinned slippers, pools of saliva have been forming. There are those of us who lack restraint, who drool. The jumpsuited Latino janitor moves amongst us, a pail in one hand and a squeegee mop in the other." (At the same time, "disapproving critiques of the fetishizing of the slippers are offered by religious fundamentalists." They want to buy the slippers in order to burn them.) But can the slippers do what they are supposed to?

> "Home" has become such a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travails. There is so much to yearn for. . . . How hard can we expect even a pair of magic shoes to work? They promised to take us *home*, but are metaphors of homeliness comprehensible to them, are abstractions permissible? Are they literalists, or will they permit us to redefine the blessed word?

Dorothy's shibboleth gradually assumes another meaning in this reverie: there is indeed no place like home, precisely in the sense that there's no such place as home. Click your heels together three times and say *that*, and you're well on your way to entering Rushdie's vision of migrancy as the very condition of cultural modernity. If Rushdie's persecutors have made the experience of rootless nomadism all too literal for him, he's still teaching the rest of us why we can't go home again. ◆

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Salman Rushdie, London, September 26, 1994.



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RECOMMENDED READING

The Constellations

by James Finney Boylan
(Random House; $22)

"Ultimately, Patrick thought, there were only two kinds of couples. The ones who agree on everything (who are essentially boring), and the ones who fight about everything (who get divorced)." In his second novel, a sequel to "The Planets," this very funny writer sets in motion many more kinds of couples than are dreamed of in Patrick's philosophy. As romantic constellations rearrange themselves, the chapter headings helpfully comment on such celestial formations as the Andromeda Nebula, "the most distant object the human eye can see without narcotics."

Toulouse-Lautrec: A Life

by Julia Frey (Viking; $34.95)

Readable and authoritative, this biography records a brief (1864-1901), wretched, and productive life passed in castles, brothels, and studios. Frey used manuscript sources that lend immediacy and coherence to a perplexing personality—an aristocrat and great artist who was also a deformed dwarf and an alcoholic. Her work suggests the kinship between the artist's biting line and his sharp verbal wit, and recalls the magnetism that attracted friends and admirers, the van Gogh brothers among them. Illustrations galore.

New & Collected Poems: 1952-1992

by Geoffrey Hill
(Houghton Mifflin; $29.95)

Through commemorations of poets who've been martyrs to revolutionary upheaval—Osip Mandelstam, Miguel Hernández—Hill is able to evoke the horrors of the Gulag or the Spanish Civil War; in portraits of Churchill and Bonhoeffer, he animates the rival claims of worldly and otherworldly power. This poet is a miniaturist who nonetheless conjures up a panorama of the paradoxical nature of art and God and history, in which each word or phrase is proper and just.

Daisy Bates in the Desert

by Julia Blackburn (Pantheon; $22)

In 1905, an Irish adventuress and bigamist, who began life as an orphan educated in a charity school, went to live in the Australian desert; there she reinvented herself and befriended the native people, whose culture and lands were being stripped away by white settlers. Daisy Bates became the Aborigines' Kabbarli—their grandmother from the Dreamtime—and she left behind a book, "The Passing of the Aborigines." In Blackburn's impressionistic biography, the author seamlessly shifts from telling Bates' story to becoming Bates herself: a half-mad white woman in Edwardian dress living defiantly alone among "my cannibals."

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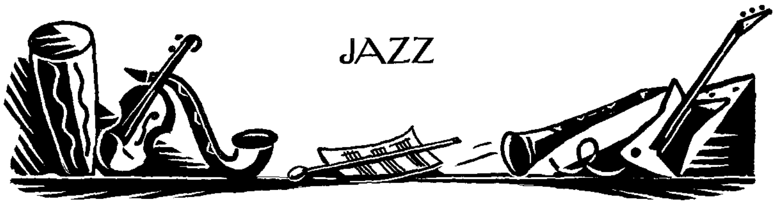

JAZZ

HARLEM MORNING

A new film tells the story behind a legendary picture.

BY WHITNEY BALLIETT

AROUND ten o'clock on a morning in mid-August of 1958, an extraordinary group of jazz musicians began gathering outside a row of brownstones on 126th Street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues. They had been invited by *Esquire* to have their picture taken for a special jazz issue, scheduled for January of 1959. Fifty-eight musicians turned up. They included New Orleans, New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and bebop musicians—the whole glorious jazz schmear as it existed in the late fifties in New York. There were megastars (Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, and Gene Krupa); future stars (Gerry Mulligan, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, Charles Mingus, Art Farmer, Art Blakey, and Horace Silver); former Ellingtonians (Rex Stewart, Lawrence Brown, Tyree Glenn, Oscar Pettiford, and Sonny Greer) and former Basieites (Buck Clayton, Dicky Wells, Jimmy Rushing, Vic Dickenson, Jo Jones, and Emmett Berry); great teachers and shapers (Mary Lou Williams, Luckey Roberts, Willie the Lion Smith, Red Allen, and Zutty Singleton); indispensable journeymen (Milt Hinton, J. C. Higginbotham, Joe Thomas, Stuff Smith, Wilbur Ware, Chubby Jackson, Hank Jones, and J. C. Heard); an Eddie Condon contingent, minus its leader (Pee Wee Russell, Miff Mole, Bud Freeman, Max Kaminsky, and George Wettling); one American woman singer (Maxine Sullivan) and one English woman pianist (Marian McPartland); a ringer (an unknown musician from Buffalo named Bill Crump); and one messup (Willie the Lion), who, bored with waiting in the hot sun, had wandered off when the chosen shot was taken, leaving a noticeable gap next to Luckey Roberts. The youngest musician, at twenty-seven, was Sonny Rollins, and the oldest, at seventy-one, was Roberts.

It had been the notion of Robert Benton, then the art director of *Esquire*, to include a batch of new photographs of jazz musicians for the January issue. He brought in Art Kane, a young hotshot freelance art director, and Kane suggested that a group photograph be taken in Harlem, the cradle of New York jazz. He also offered to take the picture himself, even though he'd had almost no experience as a photographer. The word went out on the jazz grapevine, and the musicians began trickling in on time, despite the heavy duty of being anywhere but in bed at ten in the morning. (Jazz musicians are night creatures; a musician at the shoot said he was astonished to discover that there were two ten o'clocks in each day.) Because they are peripatetic, jazz players sometimes don't run into one another for years at a time; as the crowd swelled, so did the milling, the pressing of the flesh, the hugs, and the how-ya-beens. Kane started shooting anyway. Milt Hinton, a fine amateur photographer, handed his wife, Mona, his 8-mm. movie camera and told her to aim it and press the button. He himself began taking stills; so did a student of Willie the Lion's named Mike Lipskin. Eventually, the crowd formed a ragged line on the sidewalk between two high brownstone stoops. Then, with Kane pleading and shouting from across the street, part of the group, led by Red Allen, rose up onto the stoop in between, so that the assemblage resembled an upside-down "T." Count Basie, tired of standing, sat on the curb, and twelve kids, mostly from the neighborhood, sat next to him, forming an emphatic line under the picture. Some of the musicians were coatless and in sports shirts, but most wore ties and jackets. Some were even in dark suits, and seven had hats on. Except for a few nervous Young Turks like Johnny Griffin, Mingus, Sahib Shahab, and Rollins, ev-

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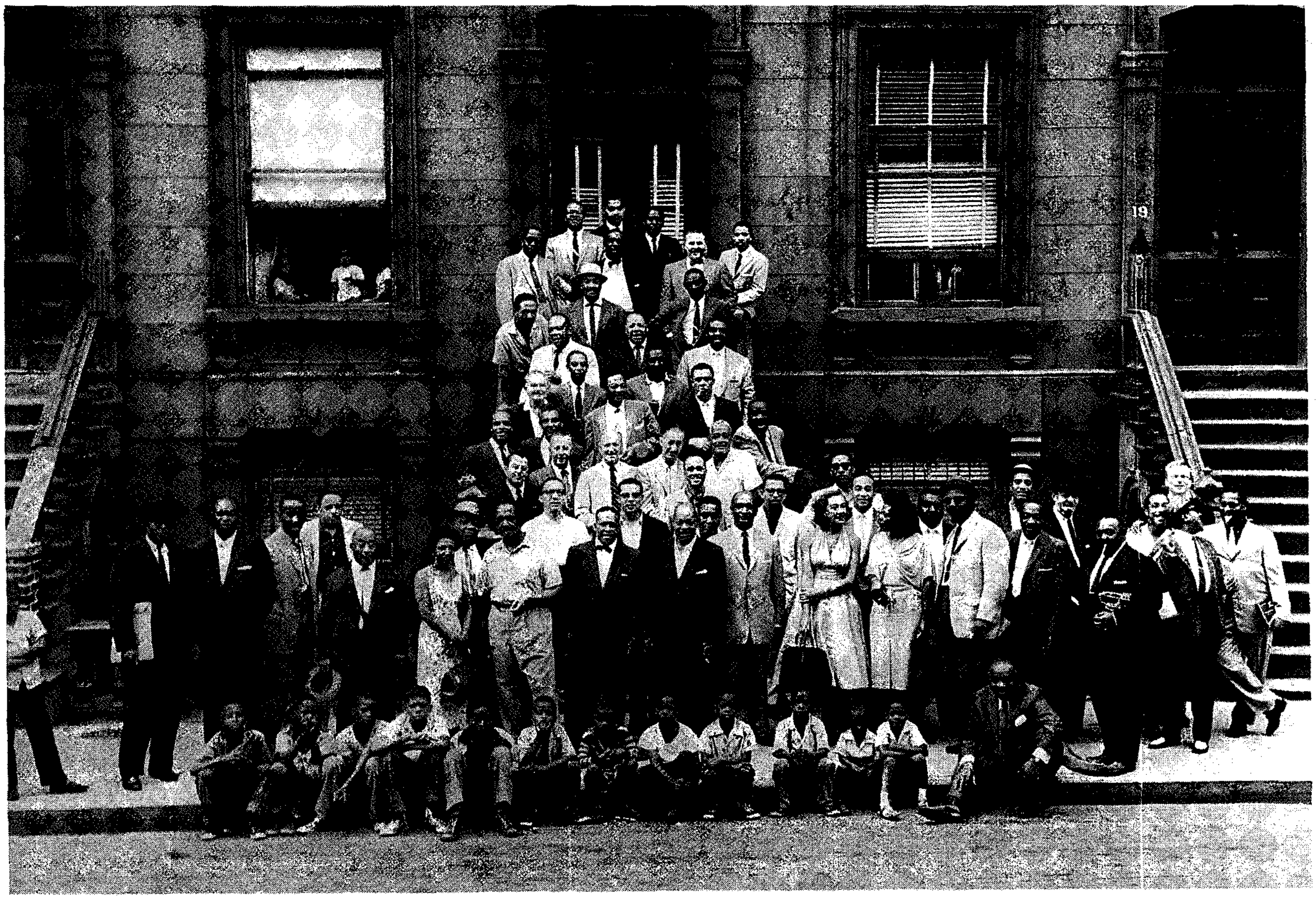
eryone looked pleased and relaxed about being where he was. Dizzy Gillespie, standing at the far right with his legs crossed, is sticking his tongue out at his onetime idol, Roy Eldridge, who is directly in front of Gillespie and has turned his head awkwardly toward him. Gillespie the irrepressible had obviously just called, "Hey, Roy!"

KANE took a hundred and twenty exposures, and the final selection duly appeared as a double-page spread in *Esquire*. It caused a small sensation, and soon became a permanent part of jazz arcana. The image also stuck in the head of a pretty, witty, famous New York blonde named Jean Bach. Born in Chicago and raised in Milwaukee, Bach has been a passionate jazz fan since she was eighteen and began hanging out with Duke Ellington and Roy Eldridge. In 1941, she married an Eldridge imitator, Shorty Sherock, and spent seven tumultuous years travelling with Sherock's group. ("It was a strange band," she once said. "It had a floating Basie-type rhythm section and an Italianate trumpet section that played a little sharp and real loud.") Then she got a divorce, moved to New York, married a TV producer named Bob Bach, and, in time, began producing the Arlene Francis show on WOR radio. She retired in the eighties, and several years ago she began brooding about Art Kane's picture. The surprising result is a brilliant, funny, lissome documentary film called "A Great Day in Harlem." It's about the taking of the picture, and it's also about mortality, loyalty, talent, musical beauty, and the fact that jazz musicians tend to be the least pretentious artists on earth.

Jean Bach lives in Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's old studio on Washington Mews, and the other day she sat in her living room and talked about her film. "I kept asking myself how all these fabulous musicians had got together on somebody's brownstone stoop in Harlem to have their photograph taken. All I knew was that a man named Art Kane had taken it and that it had run in *Esquire*. I started asking musicians I'd run into who were in the picture how it had come about, and I'd generally get these hazy, gee-I-can't-remember-man answers. One day I noticed that only a dozen or so of the fifty-seven people in the picture were still with us, and the electric light went on. It was time for me to interview the survivors, and maybe film the interviews, for the record."

Bach talked to her friend Bill Harbach, who had made some short films, and he put her onto a film person named Kemper Peacock, who found her a cameraman named Steve Petropoulos. Before she knew it, she had fifty or sixty hours of interviews. She talked to Johnny Griffin and Art Farmer, both of whom live in Europe, at New York gigs, and she filmed Bud Freeman in a retirement place in Chicago. She finally caught up with the elusive Art Blakey in "his gorgeous West Side apartment." She shot Gerry Mulligan in his house in Connecticut, and she did several interviews in her living room, placing each musician in a different part of the room to fool the viewer. Sahib Shahab died two weeks after she talked to him, and Blakey three months later, and since then Freeman, Gillespie, Buck Clayton, and Max Kaminsky have gone. Then Milt Hinton told Bach's friend Charles Graham about Mona's 8-mm. film, and she decided to somehow combine that footage, if it still



existed, with the filmed interviews—in other words, to make a movie. Bach asked her friend Kathryn Altman—Robert Altman's wife—for advice, and she suggested that Bach get in touch with a producer named Matthew Seig, who works with Altman. Seig said yes, and when Mona Hinton's film was finally found, in Milt's basement in Queens, Seig told Bach that it was time to rent a studio and hire an editor. They hired Susan Peehl, who edited the fine 1993 Billie Holiday documentary "Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday," and put her in a studio apartment over on Third Avenue, where she lived the picture night and day for the next year and a half. Seig also came up with the brilliant idea of using footage from the "Sound of Jazz" television show, which aired just six months before the Harlem shoot and included many of the same musicians.

Bach went on, "Then I discovered the joys of getting permissions from music publishers to use their music. There are twenty-three songs, or pieces of songs, in the picture, and to date they have cost well over a hundred thousand dollars. I realized early on that I couldn't swing all the costs myself, and I applied to every foundation that exists, and all I could hear was the sound of pocketbooks snapping shut across the country. I finally got a grant from a baby friend in Milwaukee. She and her husband have the Jane and Lloyd Pettit Foundation."

The film was finished last June. It has been shown in London and for a week on the Coast, and is therefore eligible for the Academy Awards, and it won a first prize at the Chicago Film Festival. It opens at the Quad, on Thirteenth Street, on February 17th. "So far, I've only had one real demurrer," she said. "And it came from Artie Shaw. We're old friends, and when we had lunch on the Coast a little while ago I asked him what he thought of the picture, and he said, 'Jean, do you want me to be polite, or do you want me to be honest?' I said the latter, and he had all these niggling criticisms, and then I realized what was really bothering him. In the film, sweet Bud Freeman speculates that in a hundred years Pee Wee Russell might prove to be more highly thought of than Benny Goodman. What rankles Artie is that Freeman said *Goodman*. If he had said Shaw, Artie would have just laughed and said something like 'Oh, Pee Wee.' "

TEN O'CLOCK JUMP:

Top row: Benny Golson, Art Farmer, Wilbur Ware. Second row: Hilton Jefferson, Art Blakey, Chubby Jackson, Johnny Griffin. Third row: Dicky Wells, Buck Clayton, Taft Jordon. Fourth row: Zutty Singleton, Red Allen. Fifth row: Sonny Greer, Jimmy Jones, Tyree Glenn. Sixth row: Miff Mole, J. C. Higginbotham, Charles Mingus. Seventh row: Jo Jones, Gene Krupa, Osie Johnson. Eighth row: Max Kaminsky, George Wettling, Bud Freeman, Pee Wee Russell, Buster Bailey. Ninth row: Scoville Browne, Bill Crump, Ernie Wilkins, Sahib Shahab, Sonny Rollins. Bottom row: Gigi Gryce, Hank Jones, Eddie Locke, Horace Silver, Luckey Roberts, Maxine Sullivan, Jimmy Rushing, Joe Thomas, Stuff Smith, Coleman Hawkins, Rudy Powell, Oscar Pettiford, Marian McPartland, Lawrence Brown, Mary Lou Williams, Emmett Berry, Thelonious Monk, Vic Dickenson, Milt Hinton, Lester Young, Rex Stewart, J. C. Heard, Gerry Mulligan, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie. On the curb: Count Basie.

SUSAN PEEHL'S quicksilver editing of "A Great Day" mixes interviews (she sometimes cuts rapidly back and forth between two musicians talking about the same subject, to give the impression that they are conversing with each other), archival footage, sequences from the astonishing "Sound of Jazz," Mona Hinton's film, Hinton's and Mike Lipskin's stills, and more than a dozen of Art Kane's alternative shots. She mixes these last in such a way that the musicians move and talk and gesticulate: you are on 126th Street in 1958. She also gives us miniature portraits of Thelonious Monk playing (his feet flapping like flounders on the floor beneath the piano) and doing one of his impromptu dances, and of Lester Young in his famous black porkpie hat, his flat eyes peering out of his pale, flat face. Near the end of the film, there is a calm, and Art Farmer says, "We don't think about people not being here. If we think about Lester Young, we don't think, Well, Lester Young was here but he's not here anymore. Lester Young *is* here. Coleman Hawkins *is* here. Roy Eldridge *is* here. They are in us, and they will always be alive." Farmer has a dark, heavy voice, and he makes you shiver. ♦

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BUNTER

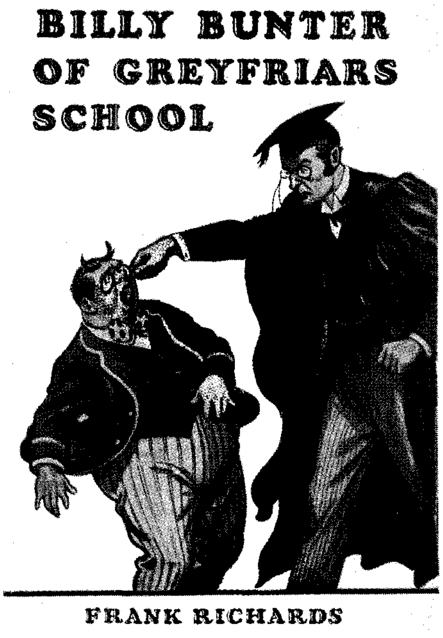
BY JONATHAN WILSON

LAST spring, my oldest son was given the opportunity, along with everybody else in his sixth-grade English class, to present an oral book report on "any novel that he wanted." At the time, he happened to be reading "Billy Bunter and the Blue Mauritius," by Frank Richards (the pen name of the author Charles Hamilton). He'd already finished "Bunter Does His Best" and "Bunter the Bad Lad."

Billy Bunter is a famous—perhaps the most famous—schoolboy in English juvenile fiction. He first appeared in a comic strip in the magazine *Magnet* in 1908 and remained there until wartime paper shortages closed down the magazine, in 1940. Bunter reëmerged after the war and went on to strut his stuff—school blazer, checked pants, black waistcoat, yellow polka-dot bow tie—in thirty-eight of his creator's novels. Richards' books are still widely read in England. A few facsimile editions of the original hardbacks, published in the U.K. in 1991 and 1992, somehow found their way into the remainders section of my local bookstore, in Newton, Massachusetts. I bought five and passed them on.

The thing about Bunter is he's fat. His best pals like to heckle him. To them he's "The Fat Owl of the Remove," a "frabjous fathead," a "fat chump," a "fat ass" (that's "ass," not "arse"), and a person who has "fat thoughts." At Greyfriars School, he's an object of ridicule but also of affection. He's always borrowing money against the collateral of a postal order from his parents, which never arrives. He gets into terrible comic scrapes of an Edwardian variety involving low-class lads from the local racecourse or upper-class bounders and cads from the ranks of his own schoolmates. His perennial antagonist is his form master, Mr. Quelch, a caner and ear-tweaker supreme, with whom Bunter engages in an endless conversational pitch-and-toss of accusation and rebuttal. In the end, Bunter always emerges from his tribulations chastened but triumphant.

Like a few million kids before him, my son found the Bunter books very funny. I heard him laugh out loud while he was reading, which doesn't happen all that often. My son is no egghead; he is a fan (and defender) of Snoop Doggy Dogg, and is fully American in all his interests and activities. He is a wearer of layered oversized clothes. Like most Americans, he prefers talking to reading. There aren't many subjects that he is afraid to discuss in front of his teachers; one is the boy who peruses the Victoria's Secret catalogue under his desk during math, and Billy Bunter, an English schoolboy with a weight problem circa 1908-60 (the years pass, but Bunter & Company are preserved in public-school aspic), turned out to be another. When I pressed him to pass on his obvious enthusiasm for the works via the oral book report, he turned white and said, "Are you crazy?"



BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL

FRANK RICHARDS

At first, I thought he was embarrassed by the idea of accentuating the uncool, British-influenced side of his personality, but, no, it turned out that while I wasn't watching he had been inhaling the Zeitgeist. He explained that he would rather take the consequences of seeming to have read nothing than risk coming off as "insensitive" in front of his classmates and teacher by promoting a book that was hard on the abdominally challenged.

Here was a new twist on the guilty pleasures of reading. I persevered, arguing, boringly, that his teacher, an open-minded person working in a liberal environment, would be quite capable of turning whatever came up in class into a useful discussion. But the long reach of P.C. had my son by the throat, and before you could say "Buns of Steel" he had ordered me from his room.

In the end, he discussed "Bridge to Terabithia," a novel he had yawned through in fifth grade, which caused a furor in Oskaloosa, Kansas, last year, on account of its bad language—not quite as bad, though, I guess, as "potty porpoise" and "fat guzzler." As Bunter himself might have put it, Oh, crikey! ♦

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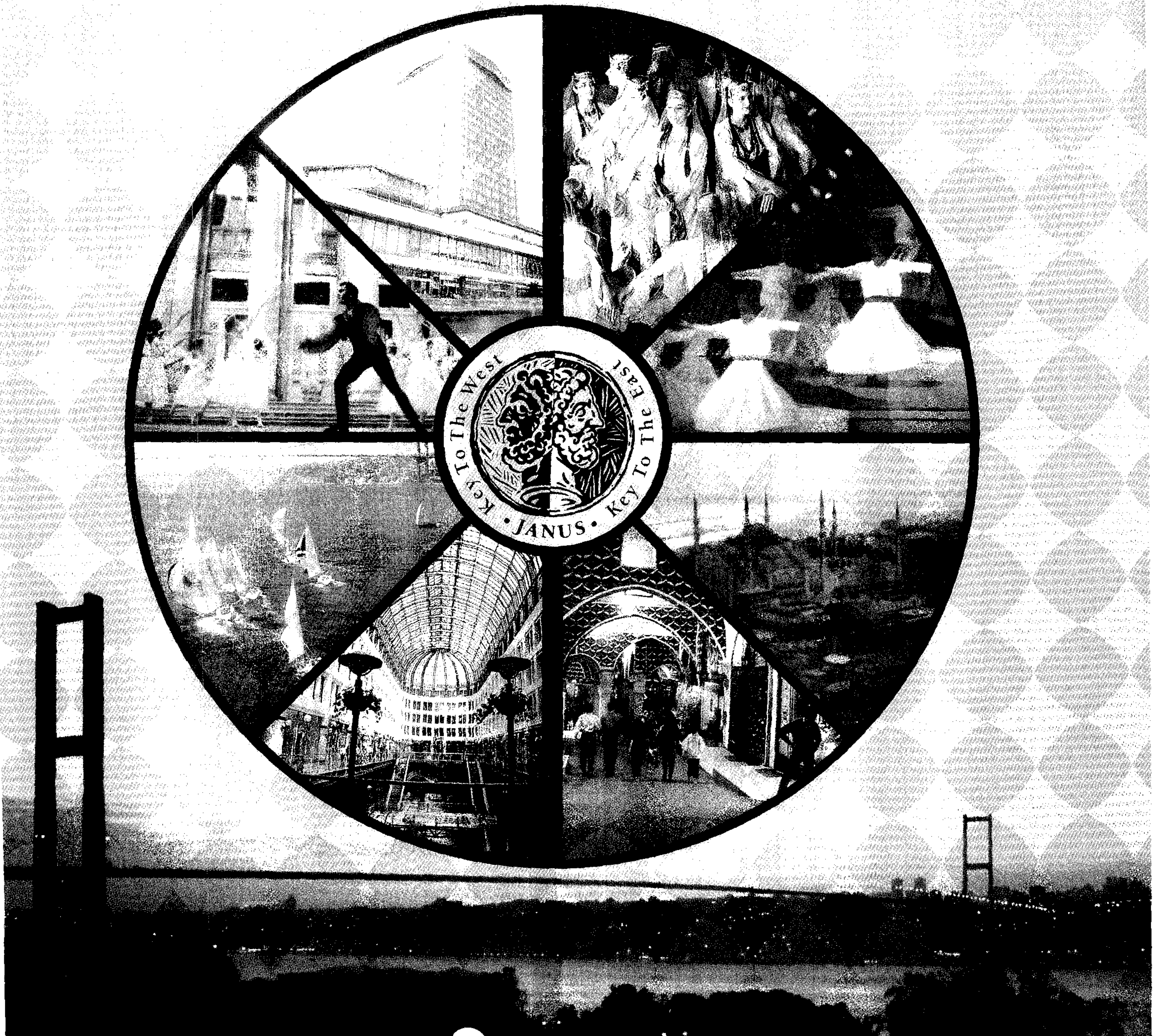

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